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# THE MAGNIFICENT ROTHSCHILDS



*By the same author*

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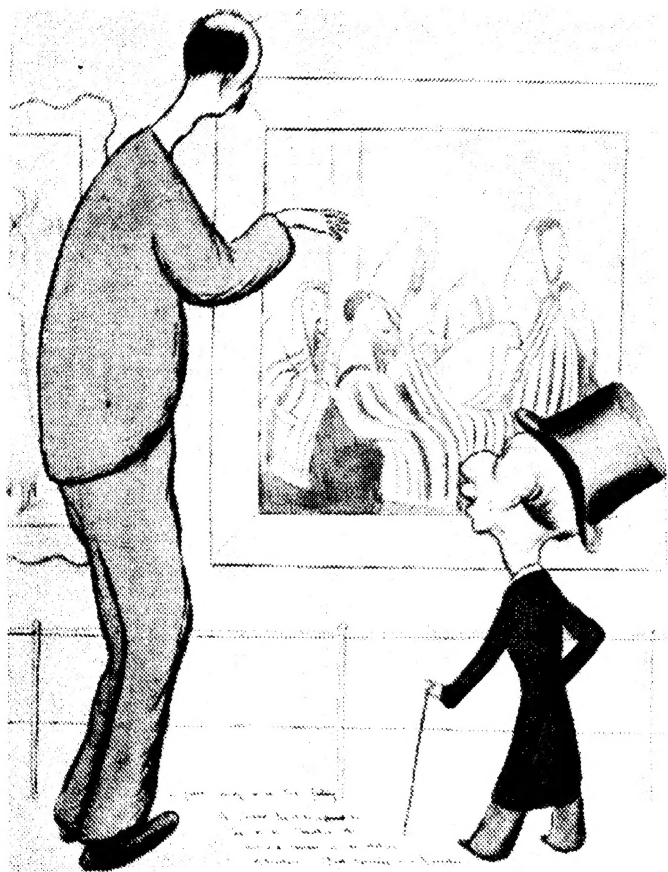
A LIFE OF MENASSEH BEN ISRAEL

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

THE JEWISH CONTRIBUTION TO CIVILISATION

*etc. etc.*





ALFRED DE ROTHSCHILD AT THE TATE GALLERY

*"The Curator explaining to one of the Trustees the spiritual fineness of W. Rothenstein's 'Jews Mourning in Synagogue.'"*

(Caricature by Max Beerbohm)

# THE MAGNIFICENT ROTHSCHILDS

By  
CECIL ROTH

LONDON  
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*To*  
GUSTAVE TUCK  
A belated present on his  
eightieth birthday.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The frontispiece, from a caricature now in the Tate Gallery, is by permission of the Director. The drawing facing page 28 is reproduced by permission of the Librarian of the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. The photograph facing page 56 is from Robert Henry's *A Century Between* by courtesy of the Author and Publishers. The photograph of Alfred de Rothschild, facing page 140, is by permission of Messrs. W. and D. Downey. The photograph facing page 224 was specially taken by the Rev. Arthur Barnett. The illustrations facing pages 96, 126, 180, 214 and 280 are by courtesy of *The Jewish Chronicle*, to the Editor and Picture Editor of which special thanks are due.

## PREFACE

THIS volume is a by-product of the perusal, with a very different object in view, of a long sequence of memoirs of Victorian and Edwardian times. This amazingly extensive literature, depicting an age which is fast becoming legendary, brings home in a forceful manner the great part which the Rothschild family played in that great era, over a period of several decades. A whole library has been written about the origin and progress of the family fortune. The present pages take all this for granted. They attempt to deal with an entirely different matter—the manner in which that fortune was utilized during the period when the English Rothschilds were at the height, not necessarily of their wealth or of their influence, but certainly of their fame and their social importance.

In trying to give some account of this, it is necessary to pay a certain amount of attention to almost every facet of English life during the years in question. It is not easy to pick up any collection of reminiscences of the age—whether written by stage favourites or political leaders or art critics or race-horse trainers or men about town—in which there is no mention of one or the other of the three magnificent brothers, Nathaniel, Alfred and Leopold, who stood at the head of the family and of the firm during the forty years which preceded the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Though other individuals are of course more prominent by

far, no other family figures so insistently and so seductively.

Though the present volume is mainly intended for diversion, it is possibly not without its serious application. During the past few years, a certain obloquy has begun to be attached to the mere fact of the accumulation of wealth—a reaction from the state of affairs a century or even half a century ago, when it was generally regarded as the principal object of terrestrial existence. (One should perhaps have written “great wealth.” A moderate fortune is excusable even to-day: only when it reaches a certain point, variable according to the origin of its owner, does it seem to become reprehensible.) A writer, who is never likely to enter personally into these particular lists, may perhaps claim to view the matter dispassionately: and it seems to him that the verdict must depend on the manner in which the wealth is gained and the uses to which it is put. There can be no extenuation for building up a fortune at the cost of human misery, as has been the case with many of the notorious American millionaires of the past century. But it has never been suggested that the Rothschild fortune was tainted in this manner: the worst that has been alleged against the family is stock-exchange manipulation (never then regarded as a very heinous sin, and sometimes viewed with positive admiration), the most noteworthy instances of which turn out on examination to be mythical. On the other hand—a point which is so often overlooked by the wealthy—it is not the fact of the possession, but the manner of the use, of a great fortune which can justifiably raise the owner above the ordinary run of less blessed mortals.

In the Rothschild family in England, in the days of the three magnificent brothers, we have a case in point. An examination of how they spent their lives, and what they did with their riches, is to a certain degree a touchstone whereby the present system may be justified or condemned. Looking at the scene (as I hope) objectively, I do not think that it necessarily stands condemned. Were other wealthy men to use their means as wisely as the Rothschild family did as a whole, social discontents might not be quite so acute.

This volume is based on a very wide variety of sources, to detail all of which would be wearisome. In particular, use has been made (as indicated previously) of the Memoirs and Biographies of the last generation and the last generation but one. The information obtained hence has been supplemented to a considerable extent by the newspapers and other periodical publications of the period. The works devoted to the history of the Rothschilds generally neglect this, the twilight of the house: but Corti's *Reign of the House of Rothschild*, Henrey's *A Century Between* and Lady Battersea's *Reminiscences* have been most useful. Numerous personal reminiscences (not the author's) are also embodied. The Rothschild family and its records have had no part whatsoever in the production. It is, however, to be hoped that this initial exploration may perhaps encourage them to open their muniments to inquirers, and to hasten the publication of that definitive study which the world was promised a quarter of a century ago.

It is my pleasant duty to express here my deep sense of gratitude for the great help I have received (not for the first time) from my friend, Paul H. Emden, who, with a generosity equalled by the

range of his knowledge, has helped me at every turn, and in particular drew up the admirable genealogical table at the close.

CECIL ROTH.

London, *September* 1938.

## CHAPTER I

### FRANKFORT

IN the midsummer of 1836, a remarkable gathering took place at Frankfort-on-Main. That once-Imperial city had often seen, in the course of its millennial history, conferences of crowned heads, diplomats and soldiers. Yet never perhaps had it known before such an assemblage of influence and (in one specific direction) of talent: never, certainly had the beldams of the *Judengasse* been so swollen with pride, curiosity and gossip.

The occasion was a wedding—but no ordinary one. It was a wedding which was to unite (or, if you preferred, to re-unite) two of the greatest fortunes of Europe by yet another bond. Young Lionel Nathan, eldest son of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, of London, was to marry his first cousin, Charlotte, daughter of Karl Rothschild, of Naples.

His first cousin? Yes. It was anti-eugenic, perhaps. But eugenics were as yet unknown: and Amschel Mayer, eldest of the five sons of the founder of the House, had recommended this (it was said) as a simple method of retaining large dowries in the family and of being protected from the regrettable necessity of having to open the tribal circle too widely. (Incidentally, once the handsome dowries had been paid—which was rather like transferring money from one trouser pocket to another—the brides' claim on their

parents was finished, and they received nothing worth mentioning by will: this, too, was part of the System.) In any case, though theoretically the practice might be a deplorable one, according to the opinions which were to establish themselves half a century later, in fact the offspring that was to result in this case at least amply vindicated the experiment of inbreeding. Hence the Magnificent Rothschilds who were to cut such a figure in London life half a century later: and hence, therefore, this book.

The ceremony was to take place in the city that had been the cradle of the family—in which a generation earlier Mayer Amschel Rothschild, giving up all idea of the Rabbinate, had developed a small business in old coins and medals into one of the most famous banking houses of the Western world. Thither the great clan now assembled from every corner of Europe, with their wives and children and satellites. The aged grandmother was necessarily there—as she always was: Gudule, widow of the founder of the firm, now in her eighty-fifth year. There was nothing that gold could buy that she might not have enjoyed, had she so desired: but she still clung to the narrow house in the *Judengasse* where her husband had brought her after their marriage, more than half a century before, fearing that fortune might desert the family if she forsook the spot where it had first touched them with its gold-laden wings. There she received in state, in the stuffy sitting-room decorated in the most formal style of the previous century, with her bridal wreath carefully preserved under glass, in the place of honour. “Of course I don’t want to grow younger,” she scolded her doctors, “I want to grow older.”

Amschel Mayer was by her side—the eldest of the five brothers, who had the originality to remain in his birthplace and therefore played the host on this occasion. Solomon, of course, had come from Vienna, where he hobnobbed, not unprofitably, with old Metternich, until the two fell simultaneously before the revolutionary mob not many years after and went into reluctant retirement. James was there, from Paris, fox-faced and sandy-haired, “a happy mixture of the French dandy and the orange-boy,” with his young wife, Betty (Solomom’s daughter!) whom he had married in obedience to his dead father’s express desire—one of the prettiest women in the French capital as well as the most discriminating, according to Heine. With them, they had brought the composer Rossini, who was seen so frequently at their house in the Rue Laffitte that he is still suspected of being a Jew. And of course there were the parents of both the young people, with a host of other relatives—half of them bronzed with the Neapolitan sun and half rheumed with the London fog: the English side seeming at Frankfort as ridiculously insular as their cousins seemed foppishly Latin.

The assemblage was dominated by the stout, amorphous, ill-dressed figure of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, the bridegroom’s father, perhaps the most talented and least polished even of that astonishing family, who had left Frankfort with a letter of credit in his pocket just before 1800 to deal in Manchester goods and by the year of Waterloo had become the financial oracle of Europe. His very charming and very forthright wife was of course at his side—Hannah, daughter of Levi Barent Cohen of London, the arch-ancestor of Anglo-Jewry and (through intermar-



riages) of no small part of the English aristocracy.

Their children accompanied them in full strength, so that their old grandmother might have the joy of seeing them all before she died (though in fact that was not to happen for a long time to come, and she saw some of their children too in due course). They made quite a numerous troop, and several coaches had been needed to transport them all with their baggage across Germany. Charlotte, the eldest, had married Anselm, her uncle Solomon's son, ten years previous, and was now living in Vienna: she had already set a good example to the young couple by bearing three children, with another under way and three more to come. Then came Lionel, who was to stand beneath the traditional bridal canopy on the present occasion; three more brothers, Anthony, Nathaniel and Mayer;<sup>1</sup> and two other daughters, Hannah and Louisa—seven children in all, ranging in age from twenty-nine to sixteen years.

It was thus more than a wedding. It was a family reunion, of the most famous or (if you preferred to regard it in that way, though very few persons did) the most notorious family in the world at the time. Incidentally it served the purposes of a conference between the five great brother-captains of finance who, through genius and luck and circumstance, had come to wield a weight in the economic life of nations that had hitherto been unexampled.

The ceremony was celebrated on June 15th, with

<sup>1</sup> This form is being used throughout the present volume for the sake of regularity: in the sources, it alternates, confusingly and inconsistently, with *Meyer*. In the case of the founder of the London house, the "Mayer" is not a "given" (one can hardly speak of a "Christian") name but simply an addition in accordance with current German-Jewish usage, to distinguish the sons of Mayer Rothschild (who in turn called himself Mayer Amschel after his father) from possible homonyms of a different branch.





a splendour and magnificence which even in those days of extravagant weddings were not often paralleled. Only one person was ill at ease. It was the bridegroom's father, who had been suffering from a carbuncle, and seemed in a wretched state of health. So as not to mar the festivities, he forced himself to keep up until the celebration was over. But at the climax of the rejoicings, on the very day of the wedding, he was taken seriously ill. He obstinately maintained that it was only a passing attack, but his looks belied him. He steadily grew worse. German medicine was not yet fertilized by non-Aryan genius, and the treatment was sadly bungled. At last, his English-born wife, for whom the square mile around Mansion House represented the acme of civilization, sent to London for his own physician—Benjamin Travers, for some years his neighbour in the City. But by the time he arrived, it was too late. General poisoning had by now set in. The great financier had passed a couple of days in delirium, and then, on July 28th, after bidding his devoted wife a last "good night" had given in, and allowed the Angel of Death to snuff out the candle.

Not long after, a carrier-pigeon was shot at Brighton. Under its wings was found a pellet of paper, bearing the words, *Il est mort*. Thus (it was said) the English world of finance was informed to its consternation of the death of the colossus who had dominated it for the past quarter of a century.

The body was brought back by steamboat up the river to London. From the landing-stage it was conveyed to the house in New Court, St. Swithin's Lane, acquired in 1810, but for the past eleven years used for business purposes only. The

funeral took place in the cemetery of the Great Synagogue in Mile End. London had seldom witnessed such a procession: never, perhaps, one such as this in honour of a private individual. The whole of the City turned out to see the *cortège*, and the police force had difficulty in maintaining order. The coffin was preceded by boys from the Jewish orphanage, in which the dead financier had been particularly interested, clothed in white and chanting psalms. It was followed not only by his four sons (in accordance with Jewish practice the women-folk remained behind in the darkened house) but also by the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs, several Aldermen, and the Ambassadors of Austria, Russia, Prussia, Naples and Portugal. The ceremony was in itself a striking testimony to the social progress which English Jews had made—partly indeed through the importance which he had himself attained in national affairs—since the dead man's first arrival in England thirty-eight years before.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, with the passing of its head and the marriage, almost simultaneously, of his heir, the English branch of the House of Rothschild entered upon a new phase of its existence.

Nathan Mayer's death, relatively so soon in life (he was only fifty-nine) made an enormous difference in the position of the House. His shrewd old father had laid the foundations of the prosperity of the firm—but only of a phenomenally prosperous firm of German Court Bankers, not unlike

<sup>1</sup> The inscription on the tombstone set up subsequently reads: "Nathan Mayer Rothschild: born at Frankfort on the Main 7th Sept., 5537, third son of Mayer Amschel Rothschild, a man known and venerated throughout Europe, whose virtuous example he followed." The penultimate clause is clearly an exaggeration; Mayer Amschel acquired posthumous fame from his sons.

more than one other of those days. The establishment of the five sons in five European capitals (from whose fertile brain did that idea emerge?) gave the firm an international quality and international facilities. But the third son, Nathan Mayer, who came to England, was the genius—perhaps the greatest financial genius the world had or has yet known. He took the lead in those incredible *coups* during the closing stages of the Napoleonic Wars. It was he who devised the audacious scheme for conveying through France itself the bullion to pay Wellington's troops in the Peninsula. His was the remarkable news-service (not based, *pace* the legend, on pigeon-post) which enabled him to bring the government and the Thatched House Club the first news of Waterloo, and to be laughed at for his pains. It was he in fact who elevated the rising firm of Frankfort bankers to a dominant position in the world of finance.

Its influence was now vast—unexampled perhaps hitherto among persons below royal rank, save by the greatest territorial magnates and princes of the Church. True, to the outside world there was little to choose between the Five Frankforters. But the inner circle knew that the brains of the house had been centred in that ungainly figure which perpetually obscured, day after day, one particular pillar in the Exchange in London (the first on the right hand as you entered from Cornhill), and there held a mute *levée*, at which envoys from every part of the world of finance appeared, to be greeted with a nod or a whispered phrase, and to hasten away with sufficient knowledge to send the stocks sky-high or to depress them to the abyss.

That was all over, now. Anyone might take his place at the pillar, henceforth, without work on Exchange being paralysed (as had once happened, when a young whipper-snapper had tried the experiment and to the general annoyance refused to budge). The hegemony of the House now passed to the Continent: not to one of the older brothers, but to the youngest of them all, James, in Paris, where he had established himself during the Empire under Nathan Mayer's aegis. He had already given proof of remarkable ability. This he was to develop henceforth more and more, combining with it a suppleness of almost prodigious quality. Whatever government was in power in France—Bourbon or Orleanist or Republican or Imperial—he remained one of the few stable points in a fluid France: and, though he took no hand in internal politics and was always on principle a loyal supporter of whatever régime was in power, his friendship was invariably solicited in the end by its successor. He outlived all his brothers: and as time went on, he became an institution, which almost seemed to have the quality of permanence. A man who had been a not inconsiderable figure in French business life at the close of the First Empire survived almost into the Third Republic, and the venturesome red-headed youth who settled in Paris in 1812 became the doyen of European finance.

In England, the passing of the founder of the house had a different and more profound significance. His sons, it was true, did not have his remarkable flair. But they had—the eldest of them in particular—ability of a very high order, which had been carefully developed in his case under his father's training. The previous year, indeed, within a few months of the abolition of the Spanish

Inquisition, he had been sent to Madrid, where he successfully completed the delicate negotiations regarding the lease of the Almadén quicksilver mines from the Government, and had been made a member of the Order of Isabella the Catholic in consequence—a curious distinction for an earnest young Jew! And he had one enormous advantage which his father lacked. He was English-born, English-educated (at least in part), and English-trained, with English tastes and English foibles and English friends. Nathan Mayer had always been something of a figure of fun, with his ungainly figure and shambling gait and guttural voice and somewhat imperfect command of the King's English. His sons, on the other hand, were English gentlemen, in much the same sense as the Barings who had arrived not so many generations before from Bremen and were already prominent in politics and on the highway to the first of their many peerages. The second generation of Rothschilds in England no longer bestrode 'Change Colossus-like. But they inherited a great position in the City, and in addition they were part of English life.

City gossip was busy speculating how much they had inherited. Nathan Mayer's will, when it was proved, did not help much. It was understood that the elder sons had received £25,000 each on coming of age. This was now made up to £100,000, and the same amount was to be given to each of the daughters and to the youngest boy, as yet only eighteen. The business was left to the three elder sons, who would of course admit their youngest brother in due course: but they were enjoined to maintain their father's harmonious relationship with their uncles on the Continent, whom they were to consult whenever the occasion demanded.



For the rest, the details of the estate were left in intentional obscurity, and the executors were particularly enjoined not to ask for the production of the accounts. Conjecture thus was allowed to run rife regarding the amount of the dead man's estate, which was generally assumed to be between £5,000,000 and £6,000,000.

The difference between the old generation and the new was made obvious, with a minimum of delay, even in the latter's nomenclature. The Five Frankforters had casually picked up the Austrian title of *Freiherr*, or Baron, which they used lavishly. (It was quite a genuine distinction—not like the Italian equivalent, which could be acquired a little later on with ridiculously small expenditure. It is on record that one day, when the lira exchange had slumped to a new low record, one of the Rothschilds' competitors arrived on 'Change puffed up with pride, and announced that he had just been elevated to the nobility by His Majesty, the King of Italy. "Congratulations, my dear Baron," said one of his more spiteful friends. "I knew that you wouldn't fail to pick up a bargain.") Nathan had not used the title—with a sound appreciation of the English temperament, he felt that it might do him more harm than good in his country of adoption. But his sons liked the idea of having a handle to their name, which would give them a certain *cachet* in the circle in which they moved. Not long after their father's death, therefore, they applied for royal permission to use the foreign title. It was duly accorded: and it was as Baron Lionel, Baron Anthony, Baron Nathaniel and Baron Mayer that they were henceforth known. At the same time (since the German *von* grated on English ears) they rounded off the achievement by

adopting the French nobiliary particle, *de*, before their surname.<sup>1</sup>

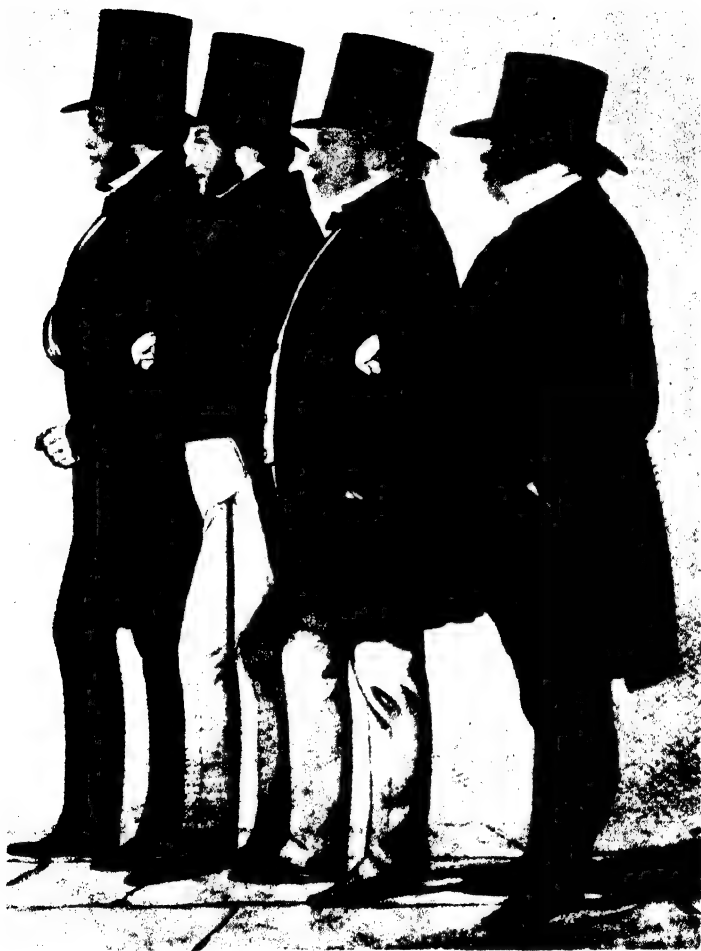
Another formality seemed at the time of the highest importance to the new head of the firm, though the passage of years robbed it subsequently of its glamour. Lionel's father had been appointed in 1820—more as a matter of form than of function—Austrian Consul-General in London. On his death-bed (so at least his brother Solomon tearfully, and perhaps misleadingly, reported to Metternich) he had begged that this dignity should pass to his eldest son. After some little difficulty (for no one in authority was quite sure as yet whether it was really worth while to make sure of his good-will or no) he was appointed acting unpaid Consul-General, on the understanding that he would use his best endeavours to support his nominal subordinate when the occasion demanded. It was not altogether an empty honour for him. It meant that he enjoyed henceforth a certain position in official circles: and above all it showed the world that the House still enjoyed the favour and confidence of the Austrian Government.

These formalities, though, were purely superficial. However much he might be commended to the benevolent attention of his uncles in Paris, Frankfort, Vienna and Naples—and indeed be able to rely upon their advice and assistance—it was a very great responsibility for a young man of twenty-eight, as Lionel was at the time of his father's death, to become the head of one of the

<sup>1</sup> They had actually so little justification for this, that Anthony's subsequent patent of Baronetcy, and even that which conferred his title on the first Lord Rothschild fifty years later, omitted it! Nevertheless, on the tombstone of Hannah Rothschild her husband (whose name had been left plain and unadorned upon his own) was posthumously ennobled: "Baroness Hannah De Rothschild, Relict of the late Baron Nathan Mayer De Rothschild."

greatest financial houses in the City of London, at the period of its greatest expansion. He had nevertheless some compensatory advantages. In the first place he gave the impression of being much more mature. "The said Baron Lionel Nathan von Rothschild seems to me to be rather old at thirty," Metternich's London agent had reported, actually over-estimating his age by a couple of years. Moreover, young as he was, his brothers, Anthony and Nathaniel and Mayer, were still younger. Hence, though Uncle James might sometimes send urgent instructions from Paris, or Uncle Solomon in Vienna could be relied on for support and counsel in moments of perplexity, Lionel was supreme at New Court. He had the advantage, too, to a greater extent than his brothers, of having been initiated into the business by his father, who believed in thoroughness. And above all he had a good measure of his father's genius.

That, in fact, was the real secret of the greatness of the House. More than one other Frankfort family, seeing the success of the Rothschilds, sent out its scions to establish themselves in the various European capitals. But the results were never quite so satisfactory as was hoped. You can buy an address to order, but you cannot buy brains; and one of the most remarkable features about the House was the manner in which it transmitted ability of the highest order from generation to generation. It reached its culminating point in Nathan Mayer. But Lionel was not far behind: and he in turn transmitted no small share of it, though clearly diluted by their wider interests, to his own three sons. It is perhaps possible to maintain that the traditional family policy of inter-marriage and inter-marriage and inter-marriage



N. M. ROTHSCHILD AND HIS SONS

(Composite drawing by Richard Dighton in Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. *Left to right* : Barons Anthony, Lionel, Mayer, and N. M. Rothschild [Posthumous])



again was justified by the extremely high order of intellectual attainment which the family managed to preserve, changed in scope but not in degree, even to the third and fourth generation.

At the beginning some persons did not appreciate the ability of the new generation, and resented the change in the management at New Court. "The young people's conduct," it was reported to all-knowing Metternich in Vienna, by a confidential agent in London, "is such that Nathan's heirs have created an exceedingly unfavourable impression. They are so blatantly purse-proud as to have offended the old business friends of their father by their rudeness, and I have heard many express themselves very strongly in this matter. The reputation of these young people in commercial circles here is, therefore, very much to their disadvantage at present." However, it was not long before this impression, probably a good deal exaggerated in any case, began to be lived down, and it was realized that the fact of the young men's speaking good English and enjoying the amenities of life did not necessarily mean that they were fools.

While Baron Lionel (as he was henceforth generally called) was the head of the firm in New Court, filled his father's place so far as one man was able to in the world of finance, and personified his co-religionists in the long-drawn battle for the removal of Jewish disabilities which was now entering on its decisive phase, his brothers shone in different spheres. They were assiduous of course in their attendance at New Court, where they took a great deal of the burden of administrative detail off their brother's shoulders: but the great decisions and the chief responsibility remained with him. One of them, indeed, disappeared from the English

scene quite early in life. This was Nathaniel, the third of the brothers, who married his Uncle James' only daughter, removed to Paris, and thus became responsible for the liaison between the English and the French houses. An accident in the hunting field which made him a permanent invalid had removed him from ordinary activity while still in the thirties, and he seldom came into the public eye. Englishmen thus thought of the family as consisting of three brothers only.

Anthony, the second brother—Nathaniel's immediate senior—was more fond of riding a horse over the Downs or shooting partridges in his well-stocked coverts, than of sitting at his desk in the City, and did his best to live the life of a country gentleman at his Buckinghamshire seat. Here his wife, a niece of Sir Moses Montefiore, made an admirable hostess: and when he was elevated to the baronetcy in 1846 (not on his own merits, but because his elder brother preferred to dispense with the honour), everything was set for him to play the hunting squire. Some people said that it went to his head, and that he became intolerably pompous in consequence—a quality rare in his family, who were generally content with being merely dictatorial. But with his bucolic interests he managed to combine a devotion to the Jewish community: and, while his elder brother represented English Jewry to a great extent in its dealings with the outside world, he represented the family in its dealings with Jewry.

Mayer, the youngest of the family, born when his father was more anglicized and given a more conventionally English upbringing, was frankly bored by New Court and all that it implied. He had other interests—collecting and entertaining

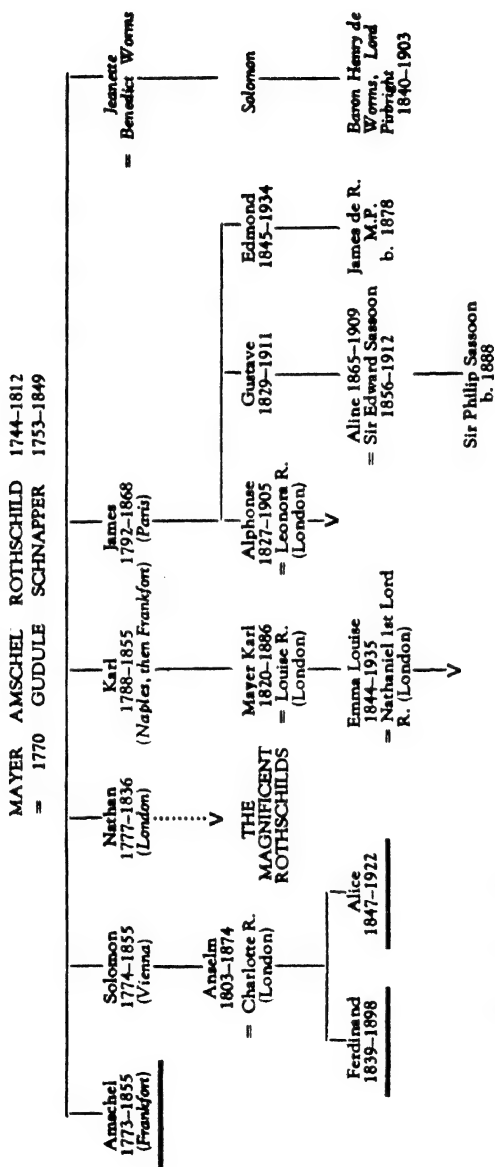
and, above all, racing. His stud at Crafton was famous: his career on the Turf was spectacular: and when the ordinary Englishman spoke of Baron Rothschild, he meant the Baron who ran the horses, not his brother who (it was understood) was interested in finance.

Thus Lionel was left omnipotent in the City. His brothers, nominally equal partners with him, were content to leave the real direction of affairs in his hands. As he grew older, his grasp grew surer, though his temper did not improve. With the passing of the older generation—Amschel of Frankfort, Karl of Naples, and Solomon of Vienna (long since an idle exile), all in the same fatal year 1855, to be followed by James of Paris thirteen years later—he became the doyen of the house: and from 1868 at least to the time of his death, still in harness, in 1879, the centre of the world's finance was in his office at New Court.

But that was as yet far ahead. It is still 1836, and young Lionel Rothschild and his bride, wearing the deepest mourning, have just come back to England, to start a new household, to take over control of a great business, and to beget and rear a new family.



## THE FIVE FRANKFORTERS



Note : Only marriages with members of the English line and descendants established in England (or the links with them) are shown here. For English branch of the House of Rothschild, see the genealogical tree at the end of the volume.

## CHAPTER II

### GUNNERSBURY

NOTWITHSTANDING the unhappy home-coming, it was to a pleasant life that the twenty-eight-year-old Lionel brought his seventeen-year-old Charlotte: the mansion in London and the house in the country and the multitudinous cousins and the universal deference and the routs and the parties and the concerts. Benjamin Disraeli, afterwards to be so intimate, saw them, for the first time, at a concert at Parthner's at the beginning of the following season. Half the aristocracy was there, from the Duke of Wellington downwards. "But the most picturesque group was the Rothschilds, the widow still in mourning, two sons, some sisters, and, above all, the young bride, or rather wife, from Frankfort, universally admired, tall, graceful, dark, and clear, picturesquely dressed, a robe of yellow silk, a hat and feathers, with a sort of *Sévigné* beneath of magnificent pearls; quite a *Murillo*."

There was occasional mild excitement for the young couple, too. Not long after their arrival in England, for example, the name of Rothschild came into the news in a ludicrous connexion: though to be sure the family had nothing whatever to do with it. If you go to Canterbury Cathedral, you can read (if you are sufficiently interested and long-sighted) a white marble tablet affixed to the wall of the nave, which records how in the cloisters

there are deposited the remains of a certain Lieutenant of the 45th Regiment, "who fell in strict and manly discharge of his duty in Bossenden Wood in the Ville of Dunkirk, on the 31st of May 1838." The Battle of Bossenden Wood had been fought against the followers of a madman (who might have been put down only as an eccentric had he not been so dangerous) named John Nicols Toms, who once presented himself as candidate for Parliament at Canterbury under the name and style of Sir William Percy Honynwood Courtenay, Knight of Malta, only son of Lord Courtenay of Powderham Castle. Subsequently he published an incoherent politico-religious broadsheet, in which he modestly styled himself King of Jerusalem, Prince of Arabia, King of the Gypsies, and Defender of his King and Country. After an interval of recuperation in a mad-house, he was released, gathered a few followers who believed in his claims, and encountered the regular troops at Bossenden Farm. When he brutally shot down Lieutenant Bennett (the same who was subsequently buried in Canterbury Cathedral) the soldiers fired a volley, followed by a bayonet charge in which Toms and half a dozen of his followers were killed. Thus the episode ended. But the Rothschilds were by no means flattered when it was divulged that at an earlier stage in his career he had recuperated his fortunes by collecting subscriptions among the East End Jews for the relief of their distressed brethren in Palestine, this time under the name of Count Moses R. Rothschild. Moreover, it had been under this same appellation that he had originally appeared in Kent, bolstering up his reputed family connexion by a flowing black beard, a nondescript Oriental garb, and the receipt

of a fortnightly package from London which (as he gave it to be understood) was crammed with gold coins.

Meanwhile, London had witnessed the accession of the new Queen, and the accompanying ceremonies which escorted the Hanoverian era to the grave. But of these the bride saw little. Four days after the youthful Victoria's first public ceremony, on August 25th, 1837 (when the Victoria Gate of Hyde Park, on Bayswater Road, was formally opened) she gave birth to a daughter, Leonora, who as the beautiful Baroness Alphonse de Rothschild was to become a great figure in French society under the Third Empire. Two years after, to the very day, another daughter was born, Evelina, later to marry her cousin Ferdinand. Notwithstanding this unpropitious beginning, doubly unwelcome to a philoprogenitive Jewish clan, the future of the House was safe. On November 8th, 1840, a son was born at last, named Nathan Mayer after his grandfather, but generally, unnecessarily, and confusingly called Nathaniel. In July 1842, a brother arrived, called Charles after his maternal grandfather; to which Alfred was prefixed for no visible reason (the Royal Prince of that name was still to come). And in 1845 the family was completed by the birth of Leopold, the youngest of all, named after the King of the Belgians, Queen Victoria's uncle, and his father's very good friend, whom Nathan Mayer had once sent home from New Court in a glass coach as he considered it beneath the dignity of the suitor to the hand of an English Princess to drive about London in a hackney carriage. (None of the Victorian Rothschilds, it may be observed, emulated in prolificness their great Frankfort progenitor, who besides the five

famous sons and an equal number of daughters, produced ten more children who did not survive!)

They seem to have been particularly beautiful children, even if one discounts the adulation which wealth may generally anticipate. The father being colloquially designated the King of the Jews, it is not difficult to imagine what direction the adulation would assume. Later on, though, there was some dispute as to which of the children received the greatest compliment of all. Thackeray, returning home on one occasion from a visit to one of the Rothschilds (was it Lionel or Anthony?), drew a touching pen-picture in his *Pendennis*:

I saw a Jewish lady only yesterday with a child at her knee, and from whose face towards the child there shone a sweetness so angelical that it seemed to form a sort of glory round both. I protest I could have knelt before her too, and adored in her the Divine beneficence.

Years after, it was recorded that Mary Anne Disraeli, visiting Baroness Lionel, shortly after Leopold's birth, had told her without mincing words: "My dear, that beautiful baby may be the future Messiah, whom we are led to expect. Who knows? And you will be the most favoured of women."

The remark sounds more characteristic of Benjamin Disraeli himself, though his wife showed herself an apt pupil in such things for all her studied stolidity. In any case, while Leopold was a child he was often called "the Little Messiah" by his family. Later on, though, Nathaniel, as the head of the house, seems to have considered that an anecdote of this type belonged to him, as it were by right of primogeniture. "When I was

born," he told George Cornwallis-West, quite late in life, "I was so beautiful that my co-religionists took me for the Messiah. But they wouldn't think so now, would they?" he added, ruefully.<sup>1</sup>

It was a happy childhood for the five, between the country house just outside London and the mansion in Piccadilly and later on the estate in Buckinghamshire, all with the constant coming and going of cousins and uncles from every part of Europe and statesmen and financiers and artists and writers and the representatives of foreign powers, and occasional crowned heads and princes of the blood. Sometimes, there was greater excitement—in 1848, for example, the Year of Revolutions, when continental Rothschilds came knocking at the door of Uncle Anthony's in Grosvenor Place, late at night, seeking refuge after the overthrow of the Orleans dynasty in France.

But it was grandmother's house in the country which especially attracted the children. In 1835, not long before he left England for the last time, Nathan Mayer had purchased a new rural residence. He had started off modestly, by taking a little house just outside London, first at Highgate and afterwards at Stamford Hill, mainly for the benefit of his children. But later on, with his growing family and growing wealth, villadom became inadequate. He now bought an estate at Acton—Gunnelsbury Park, just within pleasant driving distance of the City and no more than eight miles from Hyde Park Corner, at a cost of £20,000. It had formerly been the home of Princess Amelia, George II's daughter, who had made it famous as a meeting-place of princes and

<sup>1</sup> He had an obvious retort to make when the future Lady Ribblesdale asked him in a loud voice at a dinner party, "And do you still believe the Messiah is coming, Lord Natty?" But he refrained from making it.

statesmen and poets and wits, including Horace Walpole, who had once been commanded by his hostess to versify in the dairy, and had acquitted himself extremely badly. Little was left of the old house now: but the new residence was commodious and (according to the standards of the time) extremely convenient.

This was the mansion in which Rothschild magnificence, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was centred. For the children, it was a real fairyland, with its glorious grounds and its splendid chestnut-avenue and the sham Temple by the cedars and Princess Amelia's bath all covered with thick-growing ivy and its hiding-places and its lakes and the wonderful parties to which all the famous people in the country would be invited, and where they might sometimes see even the hero of Waterloo himself, who would pinch their ears without remembering that this was the favourite gesture of the titan whom he had overthrown at Waterloo. To-day, when the house is a museum, and the grounds are a public park, it is still possible to conjure up the brilliant scenes which were enacted there in the 'forties of the last century, and the dark-eyed children who took it all in as though by birthright, as a matter of course.

But great men, especially when there are so many of them, tend to cloy the infant palate: and it was more pleasant to play with the jolly band of cousins, even if so many of them were girls. There were Uncle Anthony's two daughters, Annie and Constance, and, later on, Uncle Mayer's daughter Hannah, six years Leo's junior, afterwards the wife of Lord Rosebery. There were the Fitzroy children, too, offspring of the runaway match of Aunt Hannah with Lord Southampton's son,

Henry. The marriage had taken place in church, in 1839, just before Evelina's birth. Of all the family, only Uncle Nathaniel had been present: though grandmother had discarded her prejudices sufficiently to take her errant daughter to the church door in a four-wheeler. Papa and the other uncles had been furious, for their sister had adopted her husband's religion as well as his name. But they did not carry on the feud; and though little Arthur could not play owing to a riding accident (curious, was it not, that Uncle Nathaniel was crippled from the same cause?) Blanche was a constant companion.

The girls thought Natty, for all his good looks, rather stand-offish: for his wide range of knowledge made him somewhat of a prig. But the two younger boys were nearer their cousins' age, and delightful companions—a quality they were to retain through life. No one could have imagined Natty dancing a fandango in ballet-girl's costume on the steps of Uncle Anthony's house in the country (as Alfred once did with his friend Philip Currie, later Ambassador in Rome) or dressing up as a girl and accompanying his sisters and cousins on a visit to a convent, an achievement which stood to Leo's credit—at the innocent age, however (*honi soit qui mal y pense*) of nine years.

There was one terrible day. It was in the spring of 1850, and Grandmamma, agile notwithstanding her sixty-seven years, was running down a green slope with two of her grandchildren, like a young mother. Suddenly, she collapsed. Her flesh was not so valiant as her spirit, and the exertion brought on a fit of apoplexy. In a short while she was dead, and had been buried at her husband's side in the old Jewish cemetery in the East End of



London. She must have been a remarkable character: and even Wellington, who had vanquished Napoleon, flinched at the idea of approaching her unless he could satisfy her on a certain matter on which she had set her heart, his party losing an election in consequence.

Others of the social position of the three Rothschild boys would presumably have been entered at one or the other of the great public schools: but for Jews that was as yet a virtual impossibility, and another medium of education had to be found. The fashionable Jewish school in London, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had been kept by that remarkable character, Hyman Hurwitz, at Highgate: a scholar of considerable reputation, a poet of some merit, and above all one of Coleridge's closest friends. He had very advanced ideas on pedagogy, which he expounded at considerable length. But his practice was not quite on the same level as his theory, and some of his wealthier patrons objected to the manners of this foreigner, who used to wear a tall Polish hat and stride about the schoolroom with a cane ferociously stuck in his wellington boots. Accordingly, a certain Garcia (who had previously been a book-keeper in the counting-house of one of the Jewish magnates, and was therefore indubitably respectable) was encouraged to set up a more select academy at Peckham: and it was thither that the Rothschilds of the earlier generation, Lionel and Anthony, had been sent.

By now, this sort of education was beneath the Rothschild social standard. Nathaniel therefore was left to the tender mercies of private tutors, notably one C. J. Monroe: though Alfred and Leopold were entered at King's College School,

then the most fashionable of those in London to which boys who did not belong to the established faith were admitted, and which specialized in an old-fashioned classical education.

Besides general education, Hebrew also had to be thought of. Dr. Kalisch, who had come over from Hungary to England as a political refugee in 1848 after fighting under Kossuth, and was at one time Secretary to the Chief Rabbi, received this pedagogical plum, teaching also Uncle Anthony's two girls. It was he too who read the service at the house in Piccadilly on Passover Eve, when the whole clan gathered round the table and the ceiling echoed back the happy festive songs. The Hebrew education followed the usual lines and reached the usual climax when, on November 19th, 1853, the Heir Apparent to the House of Rothschild, on attaining the age of thirteen, entered on his religious majority by intoning a portion of the Law at the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place, with which the family had now been associated for over half a century. His father signalized the occasion by offering £130 to charity—£10 for each year his son had as yet lived—and his mother by apprenticing thirteen boys.

The children (even Natty, at the beginning) were not old enough to understand one of the questions which monopolized a very great deal of their father's attention while they were growing up—something called Jewish Emancipation. It was indeed not very easy to comprehend the logic of the matter. Cabinet Ministers and Peers and Princes were flattered when they received an invitation to dine with the Rothschilds; the governments of the Old World and the New were anxious to win their favour: they lived in a princely palace

in town, and in a baronial demesne in the country: the heads of the firm even flaunted (though it is not clear on what authority, as has been pointed out) the French nobiliary particle, as well as an Austrian barony: they were alleged to have more influence than almost any other family in Europe: but yet they lacked one privilege which was open to a great many of their own clerks—that of sitting in Parliament.

They resented this less for the indignity itself than for the relic of religious persecution which it implied. For there must be no mistake. There was at this time none of the current loose talk about "race," nor any mystical homage to a conception of a wholly mythical purity of blood. The objection to the admission of the Jews to Parliament was, frankly, based on religion. It was maintained that a Christian country should be governed by a Christian legislature, in which no Jew could possibly sit so long as he professed Judaism. Did he become converted, on the other hand, the case was altered: and Ricardos and Lopeses and others (including even Benjamin Disraeli, who prided himself on his Jewish origin) sat in the Commons without anyone raising the slightest objection. And it would have been possible, moreover, for any Jew—or freethinker, or agnostic, or atheist, for that matter—to take his seat if he were unscrupulous enough: no one dreamed of inspecting the credentials of a member's Christianity or inquiring into the sincerity of his oath.

It had been in 1829 that the battle for Jewish Emancipation had started. Catholic Emancipation had been conceded: and there was no logical reason why the same privileges should not be

extended to the Jews as to the Papists. Nathan Mayer Rothschild had taken a hand from the beginning, and one day in 1829 told his brother-in-law, Moses Montefiore, that he would shortly go to the Prime Minister and consult him on the matter. "If you don't," added his wife, a little menacingly, "I will do it myself."

But, valuable though his influence doubtless was behind the scenes, a guttural Frankforter was clearly not the proper person to take the lead in a matter of this sort: and it was a Jew of English birth, Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, who led the agitation. Owing to his persuasion, Robert Grant, the Whig leader, introduced a Bill into the House of Commons on April 5th, 1830 "to repeal the civil disabilities affecting British-born subjects professing the Jewish religion": but it was rejected on the second reading. Three years later, emboldened by the admission of a Quaker into the Commons in the previous February, he made the attempt again in the first Reformed Parliament. This time, the Bill was carried through all its stages in the Commons by comfortable majorities, but was rejected by the Lords at the second reading. Nothing daunted, Grant tried again in the next year. But the Government was lukewarm and the House bored, and the diminished number of the advocates of the Bill encouraged the Upper House to reject it by an increased majority. In 1836 yet another attempt was made, but failed from sheer lack of interest. Few intelligent persons minded Jews sitting in the Commons, but fewer still minded much whether they did or no.

In spite of this fiasco, the minor disabilities of the Jews were falling one by one. Municipal offices and the practice of law and the Freedom of

the City of London and various other hitherto closed preserves were opened to them, one by one: and, when the young Rothschilds were growing up, only one important disability remained on English Jews—they could not be members of Parliament. This accordingly assumed a great—perhaps an exaggerated—importance in their eyes. Isaac Lyon Goldsmid was growing old: and it was Baron Lionel, together with the energetic Mr. David Salomons (a founder of the Westminster Bank), who took the leading part. The former had in fact been associated with the agitation from the very first: indeed, in 1829, when he was only twenty-one, he was one of the signatories to the petition which set the ball rolling—clearly as a substitute for his foreign-born father. Later, he is reported to have invited Carlyle to write a pamphlet in favour of Jewish emancipation—a request which the anti-Semitic sage of Chelsea indignantly refused.

The tactics of the protagonists changed at this stage. Instead of threshing the matter out theoretically, they determined to put it to the test as a practical issue, as Joseph Pease had done on behalf of the Quakers when he was returned to the Reformed Parliament by South Durham. But it took Pease a short week only to get over his difficulties: on February 8th, 1833, he voiced his objection to the Oath, and on the 14th he was allowed to affirm. Baron Lionel took advantage of his experience. Edward Pease the father (and incidentally the financier of the world's first railway, the Stockton and Darlington) recorded the fact in his diary many years after: "My dear son Joseph left the House this morning at the instance of Rothschild, a Jew, whose right to sit in Parliament is questioned: he thinks the examination of Joseph



“ Baron Lionel ”  
BARON LIONEL DE ROTHSCHILD  
*Caricature by “Ape” (Carlo Pellegrini)*



and the difficulties he had to overcome may be of some use in his case."

And certainly they were: but it was a long process. It had not been difficult to find electoral backing for the cause. The City of London (it is somewhat comical to think of it to-day) was at that time overwhelmingly Liberal in politics, and a home of progressive causes: and it had no objection to electing one of its leading bankers as its member, in conjunction with Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister. Baron Lionel had been quite frank about it, when he offered himself for election. He stood as candidate for freedom in religion as well as in trade. "My opponents say I cannot take my seat," he informed the electors. "That is rather my affair than theirs. I have taken the best advice. I feel assured that, as your representative, as the representative of the most wealthy, the most important, the most intelligent constituency in the world, I shall not be refused admission to Parliament on account of any form of words whatsoever."

Duly flattered, the most wealthy, the most important and the most intelligent constituency in the world elected him by an adequate majority (or, as Henry Drummond uncharitably put it, "the rabble of London, partly out of love of mischief, partly from contempt of the House of Commons, and partly from a desire to give a slap to Christianity, elected a Jew."). It was anticipated that even the Parliamentary Die-hards would now acquiesce in the accomplished fact. A new Jewish Disabilities Bill was accordingly passed through all its stages in the Commons by a fairly ample margin. But once more, encouraged by the outcry among the clergy, who clamoured that the country's Christianity was imperilled, the Lords were obdur-



ate, throwing it out on the second reading by 163 votes to 125. Seldom within living memory had the House been so full, or had so many backwoodsmen put in an appearance for their favourite purpose of obstruction. It was with sullen hostility that they eyed the hero of the occasion, Baron Lionel de Rothschild, standing with his brother Anthony on the steps of the throne like the elder sons of Peers, and refusing to withdraw even while the division was taking place.

It was the Bishop of Oxford (who went so far as to insinuate that Rothschild had paid the Prime Minister's election expenses in the City) who turned the tide against the persuasive eloquence of the more enlightened section. "If you destroy the groundwork of Christianity upon which this legislature is based, in order to gratify for a time a handful of ambitious men, you will destroy Christian England," he declared: and the fate of the Bill was sealed.

In the following session, a modified measure, the Parliamentary Oaths Bill, was steered successfully through the Commons, but once again rejected by the Lords. Not discouraged, the junior member for the City of London applied for the Chiltern Hundreds (thereby vacating his seat), but offered himself for re-election and was returned by a large majority once again. Thus the City let it be known in no uncertain tones that it was the Electors, and not the Lords, who were to decide who was a fitting person to represent it in the councils of the nation. And more determined action was to follow.

On July 25th, 1850, a meeting of the Electors of the City of London at London Tavern—the usual place of assembly for all political and charitable

objects—decided that Lionel should go to the House of Commons forthwith and claim the seat to which he had been elected. The following day, as his wife sat anxiously aloft, Baron Lionel came to the Table of the House, amid tense excitement. The Clerk of the House rose to tender him the oath in the usual form.

“I desire to be sworn on the Old Testament,” the applicant stated, in a clear but somewhat strained voice.

The members were agog with excitement. Sir Robert Inglis, the veteran opponent of Jewish emancipation, who had led the opposition from the very first, twenty years before, shot up excitedly in his place.

“I distinctly object,” he blurted out.

The Speaker thereupon called on Rothschild to withdraw, which he did slowly and with dignity. The House proceeded forthwith to discuss his application. It was a long and spirited debate. The opposition was of course led by Sir Robert Inglis. “I believe that I distinctly heard the words pronounced, ‘I desire to be sworn on the Old Testament,’ he began, with indignation.

A burst of cheering from the Government benches confirmed his impression, and he went on: “Am I not mistaken as to the purport of the words? Sir, from the time that this has been a Christian nation and that this house has been a Christian legislature, no man—if I may use the word without offence—has ever presumed to take his seat here unless prepared to take it under the solemn sanction of an oath in the name of our Common Redeemer. I for one will never give my sanction to his admission.”

Some other speeches in this vein followed: but

nevertheless, after an adjournment, three divisions, and another appearance of the applicant at the Table (where he stated that he demanded to be sworn on the Old Testament "because that form is the most binding upon my conscience") the House decided at last to admit his request and to allow him to take the oaths in a form binding on him.

On the following day, July 29th, at half-past twelve, he presented himself once again, and the Speaker informed him of the resolution. He took the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy without difficulty, covering his head at the close in the usual Jewish form and pronouncing the words "So help me God" instead of the conventional Christological formula. But he was brought down by the hurdle of the third oath, the Oath of Abjuration. This, which formally renounced any loyalty to the Stuart dynasty, had been laid down by Act of Parliament, which stipulated its precise form, including the final words: "Upon the true faith of a Christian." The new member repeated the customary formula, phrase by phrase, after the Clerk of the House, until he reached the last clause. At this point, he extemporized. "I omit these words as not binding on my conscience," he said: and, covering his head, he concluded the oath in the Jewish form, as he had done in the previous instances. He had already taken up the pen to sign his name on the members' roll when he was interrupted.

"Baron Lionel de Rothschild, you may withdraw," said the Speaker.

"No, no, take your seat," rose a chorus from the Government benches, countered and almost drowned by "Withdraw, withdraw," mainly from

the Opposition side. But the applicant, setting particularly great importance on correctness, obeyed the instructions.

Immediately he left the house, Sir Frederic Thesiger (subsequently Lord Chelmsford) sprang to his feet, and moved that Baron Lionel de Rothschild, having refused to take the Oath prescribed by law, had vacated his seat, and that a new writ should be issued to the City of London. On division, this was negatived: but so also was an amendment that Baron Lionel should be regarded as a member of the House notwithstanding his failure to take the oath in the form prescribed. A motion was thereupon carried that he was not entitled to vote or to sit in the House until he took the oath in the form appointed by law. Thus the City of London continued to do without a considerable portion of its Parliamentary representation, on principle, for some years to come.

It was, in fact, a sheer technicality. Nothing had been further from the minds of those responsible for the framing of the oath, a hundred and fifty years before, than that it should serve as a religious test, and it was absurd for it to be used in that manner. Nevertheless, though it was proverbial that a coach and horses could be driven through any Act of Parliament, the best brains in the kingdom found it impossible, on this occasion, to smuggle in the Junior Member for the City of London as passenger.

In the next stage of the dispute, Baron Lionel figured somewhat less prominently. In the following session, the Government introduced an Oath of Abjuration Bill to solve his difficulties, but as usual it was turned down by the Lords. Meanwhile David Salomons, having been returned

at a by-election as Member for Greenwich, tried to secure his ends through another channel: and, without taking the oath in the prescribed form, he assumed his seat, voted, and even spoke in the House. But he was ejected, and a Common Informer mulcted him of a large sum in consideration of the penalties he had incurred by so doing. He would probably not have abandoned the fight, but at the General Election of 1853 the electors of Greenwich, not so appreciative as others of a representative who could not take his seat, failed to re-elect him. The City of London, however, was faithful to its tradition, and Baron Lionel was still one of its chosen.

He left the matter on this occasion to purely constitutional channels. Early in 1853, yet another Government Bill for the removal of Jewish disabilities passed through the Commons and was duly rejected by the Lords. The same thing happened in 1855, 1856 and 1857 (in 1854 the procedure had been slightly different). In 1858, the Tory leaders at last realized that this friction with the Commons could not be allowed to continue for ever, and while a Conservative Government was momentarily in power the opportunity was taken to break through the stubborn impasse. A differently conceived Bill was introduced, authorizing either House to admit Jews by resolution without the obligation to subscribe to the objectionable words. This passed without great difficulty, and became law. The Lords, happy to be rid of an extremely boring, and not very important, problem, thus slid the responsibility off their own shoulders.

On Monday, July 26th, three days after the Royal Assent to the Act had been intimated, the

Clerk of the House of Commons once more announced that a member was waiting to take his seat. No one was expecting anything to happen so soon, and the attendance was sparse. The Speaker said that the applicant should appear: and Baron Lionel de Rothschild, escorted by Lord John Russell and Mr. G. Abel Smith, walked up to the Table. Notwithstanding an incipient protest on the part of a Tory member, Mr. Warren, who was promptly and effectively snubbed, he was allowed to make a statement indicating his objection to the Christological form of the oath substituted by a recent Act for the notorious three. He was then directed to withdraw, and Lord John Russell (no longer Prime Minister or Leader of the House—the first Derby Government was now in power, with Benjamin Disraeli as Chancellor of the Exchequer) proposed that the new member might take the oath without the words, “on the true faith of a Christian.” The motion was carried, after a little placid opposition, by sixty-nine votes to thirty-seven.

The two sponsors left the House and returned a moment or two later with Baron Lionel walking nervously between them as before, and escorted him to the table. He took the Oath solemnly abjuring a dynasty in which his forebears had not the slightest interest, covered, in the Jewish form. As amid profound silence he passed to his seat on the front bench below the gangway on the Opposition side (not far from that of his brother-in-law, Henry Fitzroy) he paused for a moment to shake the hand of the leader of the House, Benjamin Disraeli, one of his oldest friends, who had taken a shorter cut to Parliament.

Just as the proceedings terminated, a hansom cab clattered up in Old Palace Yard, and a flustered

gentleman jumped out and hastened into the precincts. It was David Salomons (now Sir David), just come up from the country, who heard what was afoot when he arrived in London, hurried along to witness the triumph, in another man's person, of the cause on which he had expended so much of his energy and means, and arrived a minute or so too late.

The joke of the matter was still to come: the biggest joke, indeed, in the entire Rothschild saga. Baron Lionel had been working for Jewish emancipation for thirty years. For the past eleven, he had been the principal protagonist. He had stood for election time after time, he had prompted a huge mass of publications and occasioned a Niagara of speeches, he had expended great sums of money and taken up an unconscionable amount of the time of the supreme council of the Nation. Now, after all this long-drawn struggle, he had achieved his ambition, and could take his seat. He did so: and he continued to sit, almost without interruption, for sixteen years. And, in the entire course of that period, he is not once recorded to have opened his mouth to speak!

There was a protracted aftermath to the struggle, for the resolution in favour of Baron Lionel had been *ad hoc*, and did not deal with the general question. In the following February Lionel's horse-racing brother and partner, Baron Mayer, also desiring to be a member of the best club in London, put up for election at Hythe (of course in the Whig interest) and was duly returned. He too was presented at the Bar of the House by Lord John Russell and Abel Smith. Notwithstanding a repetition of reactionary opposition (led this time by Charles Newdigate Newdegate) two motions

were passed by the House, by this time more than bored with the whole affair; first, that the oath might be taken in this case as it had been in similar circumstances in the previous session, and second, that in future any Jew might take the oath in the form then prescribed. It was this second resolution (not Baron Lionel's admission, as is generally believed) which in fact set the seal on Jewish Parliamentary Emancipation in England, so far as sitting in the House of Commons was concerned: the resolution being converted into a Standing Order by an Act of 1860, and the whole matter being finally consolidated by the Parliamentary Oaths Act of 1866 which substituted (for the Lords as well as Commons) a new and simplified oath omitting the phrase which had held up Jewish Emancipation for so many years.

Thus the struggle came to a very tame ending. The Rothschild brothers were content to have gained their point: but they had no particular Parliamentary ambitions. Baron Lionel continued to represent the City for some years (with a break in 1868-9 when, owing to the operation of the Minority Clause in Lord Derby's Reform Bill, a Conservative was returned for the City of London with the three Liberal Members). In 1874, when the City swung over to the Conservatives, he was at the bottom of the poll, and determined to accept the electors' decision as final. Hythe was a safe Liberal constituency,<sup>1</sup> and continued to return his brother docilely, election after election. But, though Baron Lionel was popularly believed to represent the financial interests of the City in Parliament (as his colleagues Lord John Russell—

<sup>1</sup> Hythe is no longer a "safe Liberal constituency": it returns, election after election, a Conservative member, who by coincidence is himself a member of the Rothschild clan on his mother's side, in Sir Philip Sassoon.



or, later, Goschen—did the cause of higher education and statesmanship, and as Alderman Lawrence did the Corporation) he preferred as has been indicated to do so silently, setting an example which his brother invariably, and his family generally, followed. It was of course averred on the other hand (it was difficult not to do so) that his work and his influence behind the Parliamentary scenes was of the highest importance, and fully justified his constituents' choice.

The children must have breathed many sighs of relief when the tussle was over. At last, after eleven years, there was a new topic of conversation. More important than this, though they did not realize it, was the fact that the environment in which their adolescence was spent was one of full emancipation: an age, that is, when, though some latent prejudice might persist, an English Jew's faith was officially no bar to his career. It was a period which lasted in Europe generally for approximately seventy years, at the close of which period Continental reaction renewed the old restrictions, amplified them, and made them dependent (in order to be a little more sweeping) on origin and not on religion. Nathaniel, who had been nine years old at the time when his father first appeared at the Bar of the House, was a young man of eighteen when he peered down excitedly from the gallery to see the first Jewish M.P. take his seat: Leo, the youngest of the family, was not quite thirteen.

It was by now time to think of the boys' higher education. But here there were still difficulties due to religion, notwithstanding the fact that their father was able to sit in Parliament. The older generation had of course escaped such worries. Nathan Mayer Rothschild, their grandfather, had

received his education primarily in the Jewish *Talmud Torah* of Frankfort, and in the school of hard knocks. It remained, in fact, a little sketchy to the end; and innumerable stories were current in London illustrating this and his curious guttural English accent. In this, naturally, he was at one with his brothers, with the possible exception only of James, the youngest of the brood. Karl Mayer, of Naples, at the period when he was one of the financial dictators of Europe, wrote quite unblushingly of a "kondract" he had recently made. It was told of Solomon, of Vienna, that he once made a speech, before a very select assemblage, in French. "What did you do that for?" one of his sons reproached him angrily as soon as they were alone. "I was blushing the whole time." "If I had spoken in German," the old man retorted, in homely Yiddish, "you would have had all the more reason to blush."

The Five Frankforters were at one, however, in their determination to give their children a better grounding than they had themselves. Nathan was enough of a German to be unable to imagine that any education equalled that of the Fatherland. In 1827, accordingly, he sent his two elder sons to Germany under the charge of a tutor, John Darby, who incidentally took them to call on the aged Goethe at Weimar; and Lionel was subsequently entered to complete his studies at the University of Goettingen. Mayer, the youngest of the brothers, was twelve years Lionel's junior, and his family could aspire to higher things for him. He was entered accordingly at Trinity College, Cambridge; and it was to Cambridge that his three nephews followed him in due course.

But it was for the two elder boys, at least, a

truncated academic career. Religious tests still obtained at the Universities; every candidate, that is, had to make a declaration that he subscribed to the Liturgy of the Church of England as by law established. There was only one difference between the two older Universities in this respect. At Oxford, the tests had to be taken before Matriculation; at Cambridge, only on proceeding to a degree. Hence the younger University saw a little procession of Jewish students of genius, who were subsequently to make their mark in the outside world—for example Professor Sylvester, the famous mathematician, as early as 1837, or Numa Hartog, Baroness Mayer's protégé, who had to come down without a degree although he was Senior Wrangler. Between 1860 and 1870, a strong feeling against the continuance of the tests grew up in Cambridge, especially at Trinity College; but it was only in 1871 that the University Tests Act was passed and that Jews were placed on much the same footing as members of the Church of England with respect to university education.

It was to Cambridge then, not to Oxford, that the young Rothschilds were sent, and Nathaniel matriculated at Trinity in February 1859, specializing subsequently (like his brothers) in mathematics, under the direction of Mr. Lightfoot. Among his contemporaries were (besides an Illustrious Personage, whose rank entitles him to separate treatment) Sir Charles Dilke, a life-long friend and associate. Cambridge could hardly be termed a Jewish environment at that time, for young Rothschild's only Jewish contemporary was David Lindo Alexander (subsequently a K.C. and a great communal tyrant), who with Dilke was at Trinity Hall.



GUNNERSBURY PARK



Nathaniel had to go down, however, without taking a degree. Leopold, who (like Alfred) followed him to Trinity, was more generously treated, but had to proceed to his M.A. as a "non-declarant" the year before the passing of the Universities Tests Act. (It did not really signify very much, as he only got a third!) Cambridge made honourable amends long after, on the occasion of Nathaniel's seventieth birthday, by admitting him to the degree of LL.D. *honoris causa*. It is not given to everyone to see the lapse of half a century between matriculation and taking a degree!

But, at Cambridge, the time of the rising hope of the House of Rothschild was not wasted. It happened that, among the other undergraduates at Trinity while he was there, there was one exactly a year his junior—Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, who had just returned from his much-heralded journey to Canada and the United States and was scheduled to have a little education between whiles. Though Her Majesty could not altogether rid her mind of prejudice against Finance and those who made their living from it, she nevertheless considered that the son of the City financier was likely to prove less harmful company than some at least of the scions of the nobility, with their notorious penchant for dissolute living. Accordingly, the familiarity between the two young men was not frowned upon—it was positively encouraged. This was the beginning of an intimacy which ultimately extended from the individual to the family, and was to continue throughout life.

On coming down from the 'varsity, Nathaniel was sent on the Grand Tour. But a Grand Tour, for a Rothschild, did not mean a laborious journey

from one Continental picture gallery to another. It meant going from capital to capital, staying with uncles or relatives at each place, passing a few weeks at their luxurious country seats, being introduced to the finest society, being entertained in a way that minor royalties might envy, obtaining an insight into the counting-houses and their systems, and beginning intimate personal acquaintance with those who were to be his business correspondents in future. Incidentally, he made himself sufficiently at home in French and German to be able to carry on important negotiations in those languages in future; though he prided himself on being, unlike some of his Continental cousins, monolingual, and did not even attain the linguistic standards of his own brothers.

But, more than all the tutors and the University and the travels, the Rothschild home was in itself the supreme training-ground. It was a liberal education to be brought up in that household. Young men belonging to other outstanding families might perhaps rub shoulders with dukes at their fathers' table, or hear prominent statesmen discussing politics over the port in moments of aberration. But it was given to few to be privileged from their youth upwards to meet on familiar terms so remarkable a variety of public men as was the case with Baron Lionel's children. If the great Whig leaders came to formal dinners, partly because the Rothschilds were their devoted followers in politics, Disraeli was their father's greatest friend and was to be seen at home almost every Sunday night, sometimes bringing one of his own House of Commons cronies with him. City men of course were proud to be invited, and like Thackeray's arch-snob would boast of the fact

afterwards to their friends. The ambassadors of foreign powers could hardly afford to refuse the hospitality of the leader of the London money-market, and British Ambassadors abroad were always grateful for Rothschild introductions. Distinguished foreigners would arrive in London with letters of recommendation from great-uncle James in Paris, or cousin Anselm in Vienna: and there was always some kinsman from the Continent, with the latest gossip and fashions and news. Even the least intelligent of young men could not have grown up in that household without acquiring a remarkable knowledge of men and of affairs, not in England alone but all over Europe. And neither Nathaniel de Rothschild, nor Alfred, nor Leo, was by any means the least intelligent of men.



## CHAPTER III

### SUEZ—AND ELSEWHERE

THE family circle had meanwhile begun to break up, in the pleasant and inevitable way in which families do. Owing to the distinctive Rothschild tradition, however, the breach was hardly perceptible, and the bride—the elder of the two daughters, Leonora: it was seldom that members of the family married out of turn—did not so much as change her name. For it was her cousin, Alphonse de Rothschild of Paris—later head of the French house, and a great collector before the Lord—whom she married. The ceremony took place at Gunnersbury, in 1857: and Nathaniel, with Alfred, assisted in supporting the traditional bridal canopy over her head. The band of the First Life Guards played during the wedding breakfast, sumptuous as ever, and the company was as illustrious a gathering as could be brought together in England in any private house. The French Ambassador proposed the health of the bride, Lord John Russell that of her parents, and Disraeli that of the bridegroom. The last of course indulged in a little elegant hyperbole. "Under this roof," he said, "are the heads of the name and family of Rothschild—a name famous in every capital of Europe and every division of the globe—a family not more regarded for its riches than esteemed for its honour, integrity and public spirit."

Leonora made a lovely bride, with her liquid

almond-shaped eyes and the sweet complexion of a tea-rose. (Later on, she was to be classed with the classical English beauties of all time, such as the Duchess of Manchester, Lady Constance Grosvenor, and Mrs. Bulkeley.) When she arrived in Paris a perfect furore was created. The Empress Eugenie, no mean judge, considered her the loveliest woman in France: though Lady Holland gave the palm to the notorious Mme. Castiglione who (as a great many gentlemen could testify) was flawless from head to foot. The Baroness de Rothschild was not so dependent on admiration, and therefore not so prudent, as her rival, who when her beauty began to wane retired to a hermit's existence, so that no one who had known her in her prime should see her waning looks and be tempted to make any invidious comparison. She remained a queen of Society until one day she realized, to her dismay, the alteration that had come about in her looks in the course of the years. "Once upon a time I was a dream," she said. "Now, I am nothing but a nightmare."

English sentiment was flattered by Leonora's remarkably ardent love of her birthplace, which even her long residence in another country could never eradicate. She used to say that she wished she lived at Chantilly, so that she might be able to keep her spirits up by seeing the trains for England pass by. She boarded them (though not at Chantilly) frequently enough: and in her prime she was almost as well-known, with her benevolently whiskered husband, in London society as she was in Paris.

Ten years after his elder sister's wedding, and two years after Evelina married her cousin Ferdinand (an historic occasion to which we must

revert), Nathaniel followed their example. There was another great assembly of the clan at Frankfort, comparable to that which had taken place when his parents had married thirty-one years before: and here, on April 17th, 1867, he was joined in matrimony to his kinswoman, Emma Louisa, daughter of the redoubtable Mayer Karl von Rothschild of that city. The latter was Baron Lionel's first-cousin. This was not, however, the only relationship between the young couple by any means; for the bride's mother was Louisa, Lionel's sister, and the bridegroom's was Charlotte, Karl's sister. These marriages, between cousin and cousin and (on one occasion at least) between uncle and niece—not forbidden in Jewish or some Continental law—had indeed been a feature of Rothschild family history (as we have seen) almost from the beginning. Of the fifty-eight marriages contracted by the descendants of Mayer Amschel Rothschild during the century following the Battle of Trafalgar, exactly one-half were between first cousins. Men said that the reason was in order to keep the dowries and settlements, which were enormous, in the family. As a matter of fact, there was no other easy explanation; for it would be difficult to imagine that Cupid was so discriminating with his darts as to bring this consummation about by sheer (and reiterant) coincidence.

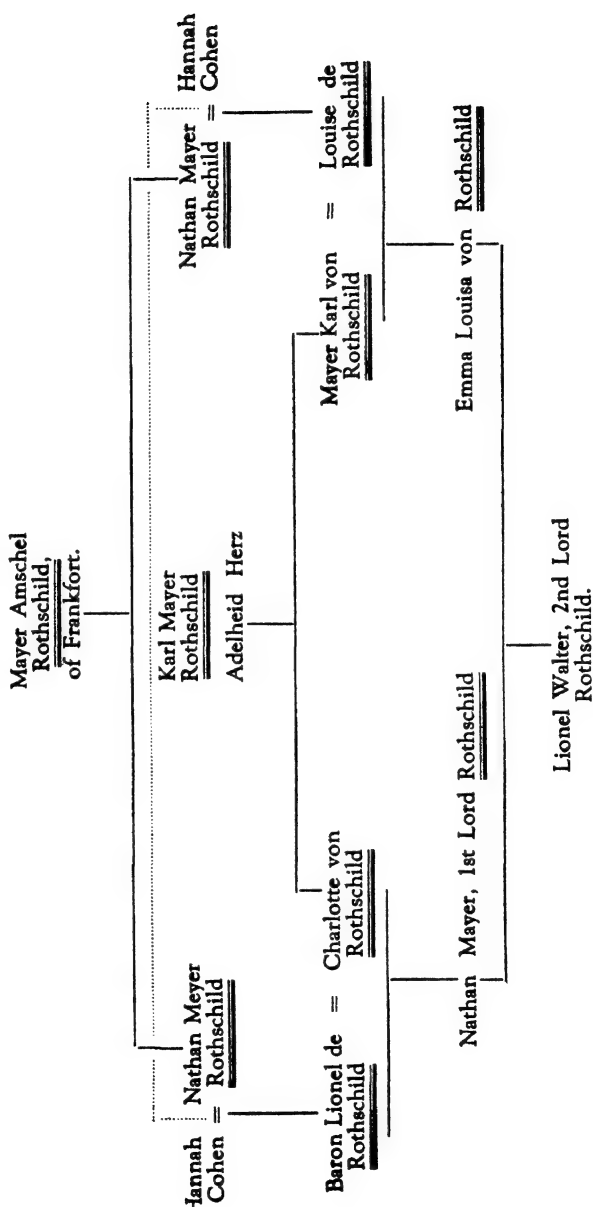
A consequence of this system was the gradual extinction of ancestors among the Rothschild family—reverse to the general process among the wealthy, whose progeny rather than progenitors tend to disappear. All persons, without serious exception, have two parents. Save in a small minority of cases, as with ancient Egyptian royalty, they have four grandparents. Further back than

that, most persons have eight great-grandparents, sixteen great-great-grandparents, and so on. Possibly there may be some intermarriage which will eliminate the mathematical progression at one stage, but that is all. With the Rothschilds, however, this has been far from the case. Their genealogical tree, instead of being in the shape of a pyramid, tends to resemble a cut diamond, tapering out and then tapering in again. For example, both of the parents of the second Lord Rothschild (Nathaniel's eldest son) were Rothschilds by birth: so were all four of his grandparents. A generation further back, owing to intermarriage between cousins, he only had four great-grandparents instead of eight, all the males being Rothschilds—brothers, and sons of the magnificent patriarch of Frankfort, the father of the Five Frankforters, who was his solitary great-great-grandfather in every male line. The tale of ancestors living in 1750 was thus one-quarter numerically of those whom the ordinary individual is privileged to forget. If progenitors are a matter for pride, wealth clearly has its disadvantages as well as its privileges.<sup>1</sup>

Eugenists would condemn this interbreeding without hesitation, on the grounds that it would tend to extinction. A glance at current works of reference is enough to show that this has not been the case. Nor has there been any perceptible token of retrogression; the Rothschilds of the fourth generation were generally speaking as capable as those of the first, though their interests led them

<sup>1</sup> Some of the complications of these unending intermarriages become bewildering. Nathaniel's father-in-law had a brother, Wilhelm, one of whose daughters married Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris. On her father's side she belonged to the *fourth* generation of Rothschilds (counting from Mayer Amschel), and on her mother's to the *fifth*, while she married into the *third*.

A DECLINE IN ANCESTORS  
AS SHEWN IN THE FOREBEARS OF THE SECOND LORD ROTHSCHILD



in a different direction. It is, however, anthropologically significant that a disappointingly large number of the offspring of these unions belonged to the more expensive sex. This was the case, for example, with Nathaniel's father-in-law, Baron Mayer Karl von Rothschild, who of course married his cousin and was driven into misanthropy as the result of having seven daughters born to him in regular succession, but no son—a precedent which his daughter was careful not to follow.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of his marriage, Nathaniel had himself come into the public eye. It is a Jewish tradition that the full formula of grace after meals is recited only when three persons are present. This, however, can hardly have been the reason which prompted him to enter the House of Commons, which he did in 1865. His choice of constituency was symptomatic of the change of outlook from father to son. Baron Lionel, whose whole life was centred at New Court, sat for the City of London. His heir presented himself on the other hand for the rural constituency of Aylesbury, in which so many of the family had their estates and where their benefactions were already spoken of with bated breath. It is hardly necessary to indicate the political party to which he was affiliated. The Liberals had supported Jewish emancipation, and the Conservatives—or a very considerable proportion of them—had opposed it: and within a decade of the admission of Baron Lionel to the Commons,

<sup>1</sup> Louisa, the future Lady Rothschild, was born in 1834 and brought up at Frankfort. She must often have been taken to see her great-grandmother, Gudule, widow of the founder of the famous family, who died in 1849 in her 96th year. She herself lived to see the birth, in 1934, of her eldest great-grandchild, daughter of the third Lord Rothschild. She thus had recollections of a woman born in 1753, knew seven generations of the family, and may prove well on in the next century to be in retrospect a human link with the middle of the eighteenth.

a Jewish Conservative would have been a contradiction in terms (a "political hermaphrodite," as one stalwart of this generation put it). It was, therefore, on the Government benches that Nathaniel took his seat: and so long as he remained in the Commons—twenty years in all—he was a faithful, albeit inarticulate, follower of Mr. Gladstone.

On returning to England from his Grand Tour abroad, Nathaniel had entered the family business as a matter of course—no Rothschild had yet thought of being anything but a banker. There he was joined in due succession by his two brothers, Alfred and Leopold, whose preparation at home and abroad had followed just the same lines as his own. None of their uncles (except Nathaniel, now in Paris and of it) had a son. Hence, once more, as had been the case in the previous generation, the future of the London house of N. M. Rothschild & Sons, was centred in three brothers—a double precedent which but for the toll of war might have been repeated for the third time fifty years later.

Great things had happened in New Court since Lionel had taken up the reins thirty years before. When he arrived, some details still had to be completed of Nathan's last great operation—the finding of the sum of £20,000,000 for compensation to the slave owners in the British Dominions, consequent on the abolition of slavery in 1833. In March 1847, Lionel offered his services to the Government to devise means to cope with the miserable condition of Ireland. The offer was gladly accepted: and subsequently, he collaborated with the firm of Baring, the greatest competitors of his own house, to raise the Irish Famine Loan of £8,000,000, waiving any prospect of profit. And, though he

had strained every nerve now as always in order to prevent the outbreak of hostilities—necessarily a bugbear of the financier, whatever agitators may claim—he raised £16,000,000 for the English Government in 1854 to meet the extraordinary expenses of the Crimean War: a fair proportion of the total, though sixty years later it would not have sufficed for a single week.

Other operations, less spectacular, were more profitable. During the career of Baron Lionel de Rothschild, the London House brought out eighteen Government loans amounting in the aggregate to £1,600,000,000 sterling. In this he was only following the example set by his father, who may be said to have introduced foreign loans to England. They had always circulated even before his day: but the payment of dividends abroad was inconvenient, and uninviting. Nathan Mayer was the first person to arrange for payment in London, at a fixed rate in sterling. Thus, developing in the first instance a new field for English investment, he was instrumental in opening ultimately new markets for English manufacturers. There was a period when the firm experienced remarkable stagnation, and almost seemed to be deserted by fortune. From 1865 to 1870 they failed to bring out a single issue, and all the plums fell to the new financial houses which were springing up in the meantime. Baron Lionel remained calm throughout, refused to “bear” a single issue, or to sell £100 of stock to hamper his competitors—his father’s traditional method of operation. He looked forward with confidence to a revival of the firm’s activity. This duly came, and in 1870–1 they issued seven Government loans, one transaction alone involving the sum of £18,000,000 sterling. He co-operated too



with the Viennese branch of the House in directing the finances of the Austrian Empire, and for twenty years, before the Tsars became identified with the grossest reaction, was agent of the Russian Treasury as well. By 1875, the grand total of the Rothschild loans, on both sides of the Atlantic, had reached the stupendous figure of £200,000,000.

There was one opportunity, though, which was deliberately dismissed. This was in 1861, when the St. Petersburg Government, its financial resources sorely taxed by the revolt of Poland, desired to raise a loan in the London market, and approached the Rothschilds. It would have been an immensely profitable operation. But it would have been saturated with the life-blood of a people struggling for its liberty: and it was by human, and not by financial considerations that Baron Lionel was determined in this case, when he refused to have anything to do with the whole affair.

Unlike his father, who at the beginning of this new era had held himself incredulously aloof, Lionel realized that the age of railway expansion was barely begun. The French *Chemin de Fer du Nord*—one of the principal links between London and Paris—owed its construction chiefly to his activity and foresight, and the Lombardo-Venetian railway in North Italy (of which his brother Anthony was one of the concessionaires, but the affairs of which afterwards became superhumanly complicated) hardly less. He had a finger in the pie of the Northern and the Galician railways in Austria, modelled partly on the English systems. He was interested, too, in the development of steam-navigation on the North Atlantic, which he recognized, notwithstanding the sneers of many naval experts, to have a great future.

The Civil War in America began not long after Nathaniel entered the firm. He was still very young, but it was said that he was one of the few Englishmen who from the beginning was sure of the victory of the Union. But his views were overruled: and the firm invested largely in Confederate bonds, and lost heavily. This appears to have disgusted them with American finance, which they left severely alone for many years, thus losing the golden opportunities afforded by the incredible expansion of the United States in the closing decades of the century. On the other hand, New Court subsequently had a large part in the funding of the American debt—one of the few occasions when they showed a really considerable interest in Transatlantic affairs. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this general aloofness, they were fully abreast with American developments, and the exactness and speed of their knowledge baffled contemporaries. Actually, the secret of their information was very easy. The first practicable cable between America and Europe was not laid until 1866 (that of 1857 was an utter failure, and that of 1858 could only be operated for three months). Previous to that, business men relied on reports conveyed on the fastest North Atlantic shipping. The Rothschild agent in New York, by a stroke of genius which was in fact the height of simplicity, used to send an express letter by steamer to his correspondent in Queenstown, who in turn would cable the contents to London. Thus, when the regular mail arrived in London, the news was always stale at New Court, where it had already been known a couple of days before.

For, even though the development of the telegraph had made the old methods of sending news

out of date, except in emergency, the Rothschild intelligence service was still remarkable, and Downing Street sometimes went to New Court for its information. During Disraeli's first ministry, when foreign affairs were in a delicate state, he considered it wise to pay a visit to "our friend" (i.e., Baron Lionel) in order to reconnoitre: and the news which the latter received from Paris and from Berlin was sometimes found of the utmost importance in Whitehall. On occasion, the services of the Rothschilds in this direction might be utilized by a Personage who stood higher still than the Prime Minister. Was it not indeed through their intermediary (which she considered safer and more private than the ordinary mails, or even the diplomatic bag) that the Queen had been accustomed, at the beginning of her reign, to send her correspondence to her Uncle Leopold in Belgium?

This was the reason for a remarkable episode in the diplomatic history of the House of Rothschild which occurred in 1870. These years were generally speaking a period of tranquillity for England, though the Continent was recurrently disturbed by Prussia's ruthless policy of expansion and the series of wars which resulted from it. The state of foreign affairs, in consequence of this, was delicate, when Lord Clarendon, Foreign Secretary in Gladstone's first cabinet, died at a particularly untimely moment. This presented something of a quandary to Continental statesmen—particularly to Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, who was anxious to make known to the British Government without loss of time his conviction that the German attempt to gain control of Spain, by foisting a Hohenzollern on the reluctant country as King, was a danger to the peace of Europe as a whole.

In his perplexity, he thought of the unorthodox channel between London and Paris which ran by way of the Rue Laffitte and New Court. Sending for the head of the French House of Rothschild, he communicated to him in strictest confidence the message which he desired to reach Whitehall. Forthwith it was telegraphed in code to his father-in-law in London. Here, on the morning of July 6th, Nathaniel deciphered it and, after discussion with Baron Lionel, took it immediately to the Prime Minister at his house in Carlton House Terrace. He found him about to leave for Windsor for an official audience with the Queen, and drove with him to the station. Gladstone was seriously perturbed. He listened in silence, and then said, after a few moments' reflection, that he did not approve of the Hohenzollern candidature, but he could not very well put pressure on the Prussian Government to make it change its mind. With that statement, as Nathaniel de Rothschild sat beside him in his brougham, he may be said to have decided the fate of the Third Empire. Returning to the City, the other sent the message, as he was instructed, to Paris: and for some little time to come this continued to be the medium through which the French and English Governments continued to communicate with one another in those fate-fraught days, the prelude to the Franco-Prussian War.

The Siege of Paris and the subsequent events heralded in a particularly anxious time at New Court, for the Paris Rothschilds—cousins and brothers-in-law some times over—were in that city during the entire course of the operations. Baron Alphonse, by now the head of the firm, knew at least a fortnight beforehand of the approaching capitulation of the French capital, and informed

New Court of the fact by pigeon post—almost the only method by which the inhabitants could communicate with the outside world. (This was perhaps the only properly authenticated instance of the use by the House of that means of communication with which they were legendarily associated.) The news did not have any important financial results, for it was a foregone conclusion. The firm, however, was thus enabled to make preparations in good time to do something to mitigate the sufferings in the city when the blockade ended. By arrangement with the French and German Ambassadors in London, a special messenger was sent to Paris with a wagon-load of provisions—fresh flour, meat, biscuits, and other necessities of life: and he was the first to enter the city after the capitulation. The three sons all worked hard on the various relief organizations formed in England. Nathaniel was on the Committee of the Red Cross. Leopold assisted in founding the Clothing Society for the French prisoners of war in Germany. Alfred was delegated to represent the firm on the Lord Mayor's Relief Committee, on which he played a prominent part, though hardly an independent one. He was very largely responsible for the dispatch of the special train and special steamer laden with supplies, which did something to relieve conditions in the beleaguered capital.

Subsequently, the House was at the head of the group of bankers who guaranteed the German Empire the stability of the exchanges, thus making possible the payment of the French indemnity (ruthlessly exacted of course by the Germans, whose standards of chivalry vary according as to whether they are victors or vanquished) without a violent financial upheaval.

Nathaniel was no longer a novice at New Court when the House was associated with one of the most far-reaching episodes in English history during the second half of the century—the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. The transaction gave rise to an enormous amount of legend. There is, besides the canonical account, a bulky apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature. Even those principally concerned in the transaction seem to have given the tale an occasional new twist as the events receded into history, and it was realized how deeply the popular imagination had been impressed. Monty Corry himself, Disraeli's private secretary and intermediary, apparently refined and polished the story in accordance with his sense of the dramatic, until in the end he himself did not perhaps know what really happened. One of the few common features in all accounts is that the House of Rothschild figures prominently.<sup>1</sup>

One Sunday night in 1875, during Disraeli's second ministry, it is recounted, he was dining as usual with Baron Lionel. During the meal, a telegram was brought to the host, who, excusing himself, opened it, read it once to himself, and then repeated it aloud. It was to the effect that the Khedive of Egypt, who for years had been in financial difficulties, had offered his shares in the Suez Canal to the French Government in the hope of getting out of his entanglements: the two parties were, however, unable to agree upon the precise terms.

Dizzy listened, with his chin sunk on his chest as usual. When his host had finished reading he raised his head suddenly.

<sup>1</sup> It is not without its significance that New Court figures least of all in the extremely sober record by Lucien Wolf, the veteran Jewish publicist, reprinted in his posthumous *Essays in Jewish History*, pp. 287–308.

"How much?" he asked.

The Baron wired immediately to his correspondents in Paris. Before dinner was over, the reply came: £4,000,000.

"We will take them," said the Prime Minister, without further ado.

There is another account of how the information that the shares were in the market first reached Downing Street. It was on Monday, November 15th, that Frederick Greenwood, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who had heard the news at dinner the previous night at Bruton Street from the financier Henry Oppenheim, called on Lord Derby at the Foreign Office, and suggested that England should not neglect the opportunity. That Oppenheim should have had the information before the Rothschilds is improbable, however, though not impossible (for he had very large Egyptian interests, and a business house in Alexandria); that Disraeli dined as usual with Baron Lionel on the Sunday evening is practically certain; and it may well be (as the most reliable of Disraeli's biographers suggests) that the intelligence reached the Government through more channels than one, and that what Disraeli heard in Piccadilly on the night of the 14th was communicated to Derby in Whitehall the following day.<sup>1</sup>

However that may be, the part that the Rothschilds played in the subsequent transactions was of the very highest importance. Parliament was in recess: it was essential that the negotiations should

<sup>1</sup> Of course, British interest in the Suez Canal was not new; already in the previous year, Nathaniel had gone to Paris to intimate to De Lesseps, on behalf of his father, that the British Government was prepared to purchase the Canal outright. But political interests had begun to enter into the question, and by that time it was quite impossible to carry out the transaction on an ordinary commercial basis. Hence the importance and the dramatic nature of Disraeli's coup.

be carried on in the utmost secrecy: and four millions was not a sum which could be tacked on inconsequentially to supplementary estimates at a later date. It was a week after the dinner at Piccadilly that the Khedive, with whom the British Consul-General in Egypt had meanwhile been instructed to open up conversations, formally informed the latter that he would sell his shares to Great Britain for 100,000,000 francs, paying 5 per cent on the purchase money until the coupons (then in pawn with a banking syndicate, as they were to remain until 1894) were liberated. The offer was at once telegraphed to London. Cabinet approved in principle. But how to raise the money without letting the whole world know, and perhaps ruining every chance of success thereby?

Disraeli was unable to ask the Bank of England for the advance of this sum, as, under an old and very proper Act of Parliament, the Government may not borrow from the Bank of England any sums of money when Parliament is not sitting except against Deficiency Bills. In the circumstances it was not possible to expect the Bank's assistance, for it would not have taken the risk of being called upon to pay the very large sum, by way of fine, which any informer might have claimed had it agreed. And it was questionable whether it could in any case have found the money without grave disturbance of the money market.

It might have been possible indeed to go to one of the big joint-stock banks. But speed and secrecy alike were essential, neither of which would have been assured in the case of organizations with big boards of directors and the inevitable delay in calling them together; and it was to



be feared that France, who already possessed half the shares, would obtain knowledge of the fact that the shares were on offer, and would immediately avail itself of the opportunity of acquiring the Khedive's holding.

It was here that Disraeli's friendship with the Rothschilds was turned to account, and the Cabinet, called together urgently for the purpose, authorized him to make use of their good offices if they were prepared. His principal private secretary, Monty Corry, was in attendance as usual just outside the Cabinet room, when the door opened and his Chief's sphinx-like head appeared. He said only one word: "Yes," and then, closing the door, returned to his place at the head of the table.

It was a prearranged signal, and Corry knew what to do. He immediately drove off at top speed to New Court, where he arrived just before four o'clock in the afternoon—not at that time so near the close of the business day as it is now. One of the porters immediately announced him to the head of the firm, whom he told in confidence that the Prime Minister wanted £4,000,000 the next day, and why. Baron Lionel picked up a muscatel grape, ate it, threw out the skin, and said, deliberately:

"What is your security?"

"The British Government," replied Corry, no doubt duly primed at Downing Street (the Disraeli touch is obvious).

"You shall have it," said the magnate. "Tell Mr. Disraeli that the £4,000,000 he requires will be placed to the credit of the Khedive by to-morrow, conditionally upon my receiving a letter of indemnity signed by the Prime Minister, the

Secretary for Foreign Affairs and the Lord Chancellor."

The letter was forthcoming, and on the next day but one an inspired paragraph appeared in *The Times* to the effect that Messrs. N. M. Rothschild and Sons had credited to the account of the Khedive of Egypt the sum of £4,000,000, and that the latter's holding in the Suez Canal—176,602 shares out of a total of 400,000—had therefore passed into the possession of the British Government.

Thus the transaction was carried through. Disraeli was jubilant. "It is just settled: you have it, Madam," he wrote to the Queen from Whitehall Gardens on November 24th, 1875. "The French Government has been out-generalled. . . . Four millions sterling! and almost immediately. There was only one firm that could do it—Rothschilds. They behaved admirably; advanced the money at a low rate, and the entire interest of the Khedive is now yours, Madam."

The country was fascinated by the coup, which appealed to its pride and to its sense of the dramatic: and though the Opposition as in duty bound opposed, the £4,000,000 (to be more precise, including the commission, some £4,080,000) were voted by Parliament without a division. The Rothschilds were for a time among the heroes of the moment. Baron Lionel used to deny, bluffly, that there had been any patriotic motive behind his action: patting his pocket, he would say that he had done very well out of the transaction. Some of the opposition politicians took him too seriously. Robert Lowe, for example, who had been Gladstone's Chancellor of the Exchequer, greatly annoyed him (as well as the *amour propre* of many

Englishmen besides) by somewhat spiteful allusions to the commission the firm had earned. But it was clear that this was not by any means disproportionate to the risk which they had taken in advancing the money: for popular and Parliamentary approval, however probable, was far from certain, and moreover there was no other channel through which so large a sum could have been raised so speedily and so secretly, on whatever terms. In any case, sixty years later, the shares purchased with the £4,000,000 were worth twenty to thirty times that amount, quite apart from their vast political and strategic importance and the annual dividend of well over £2,000,000 which the British Government received year after year.<sup>1</sup> The result clearly showed that the labourers had been worthy of their hire.

There was a curious echo of the transaction in Parliament in the following February, when J. G. Biggar, Parnell's precursor, asked the Premier whether the payment of the commission to the Rothschilds had not made the Honourable Member for Aylesbury liable to a fine of £500 for every time he had voted in the House of Commons subsequent to the transaction, in pursuance of the Act of 22 George III which forbade Members of Parliament to hold any office of profit under the Crown. Disraeli suavely intimated to his interlocutor that it was open to him to take legal steps (which if successful would have been not un lucrative) himself. The Honourable Member designated however, rising in his place, indicated that this would

<sup>1</sup> In 1937, a year of depression, the Suez Canal shares figured in the National assets at £78,622,159; in 1935, they stood at £93,199,177. In 1936-7, £2,248,437 was received in dividends—a rate of 56½ per cent on the original purchase-money.

be useless, as he was not a partner in the firm of Rothschild, either in London or in Paris, the question being thus based on an entirely false assumption. (The articles of partnership at New Court in fact stipulated that no son should be admitted during his father's lifetime.) To prove his point, he offered to produce the relevant deeds for inspection. It was a memorable incident, as it was one of the very few occasions when any of the Rothschilds raised his voice in the counsels of the nation, in which they had so exerted themselves to sit—and that, strangely enough, in support of the opposite side of the House.

The old generation was meanwhile passing away. Uncle Nathaniel, blind and part-paralysed since his accident, but still as eager as ever to know what was going on in the world around him, had died in 1870, just before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. For years he had lived in Paris, and his passing made little difference in the life of the English family. It was different when Uncle Mayer followed him to the grave in 1874. It was a gap, not only in the family, but in English life generally: for "the Baron" had been the most popular and the best known of all the brothers in general circles. Uncle Anthony died in 1876, greatly to Disraeli's distress: "a thoroughly good fellow, the most genial being I ever knew, the most kind-hearted, and the most generous," he wrote to Lady Bradford after the last sad visit. (His widow, a remarkable old lady, survived him by thirty-four years, until her reminiscences of the great men and women of seventy years before began to sound fantastic.) By special remainder, the Baronetcy which had been conferred upon him in 1846 descended to his eldest nephew, henceforth (until

he attained still higher honour) Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild.

The senior of the three partners, Baron Lionel, outlived them all, becoming more and more crotchety with the passage of years. Jews (as is well known) are like other men, only more so: and when one of them takes up hunting, he does not know any half-measures. Over-exposure in the hunting field (so at least his medical advisers said) made him subject to rheumatic gout, and he had appalling attacks. For years before his death he was unable to take any exercise, had to be carried into his carriage, and wheeled himself about his office in an ingenious specially-made chair: and during his attacks his subordinates trembled. He was in his seventieth year when, one Friday in June 1879, he finished off his business in the City as usual and was carried to his carriage, looking forward to a quiet week-end between London and Gunnersbury. On the following Tuesday he died, from what the medical profession termed an attack of suppressed gout.

The news came as a shock to the City. It was not so much that a pillar of the financial world was broken, shaking the entire structure, as had been the case when his father died, as that an accepted institution, familiar for the past fifty years—as long as all but the oldest could remember—was now no more. The funeral was remarkable. It was attended by the Prime Minister, the Lord Mayor, and several foreign ambassadors. As was always the case at Rothschild obsequies, all were very much surprised at the extreme simplicity of the coffin and other appurtenances, in accordance with one of the most admirable Jewish traditions (now, unfortunately, tending to be abandoned). “Over and

over again," wrote one observer, "I have seen Irish funerals at Seven Dials with far more costly frippery."

Fantastic reports were current as to the size of the estate. Those were days, it may be mentioned, when no opprobrium attached to wealth. A man with £2,000,000 was considered approximately 5 per cent better—not 5 per cent more knavish—than a man with only £1,900,000: and Death Duties were not yet a temptation to minimize the impression made upon the world. The public was, therefore, prepared for astronomical figures, comparable to those associated with his Uncle James in Paris, who was reported to have left a total of £44,000,000: and the better informed confidently mentioned £13,000,000 as the figure which might be anticipated. It came as a general surprise when the estate was sworn at under £2,700,000. This, though, was a comfortable nest-egg to start the next generation in independent life, even in an age when rich men were groaning under an income-tax of as much as fourpence in the pound.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRIUMVIRS

ONCE more, three brothers were now at the head of the House of Rothschild in England, as had been the case down to a decade before. As before, too, each had his own special sphere. Bearded Nathaniel (Sir Nathaniel, for the past three years) was the head of the family and of the firm. Exquisite Alfred, with his gentle voice and long Dundreary side-whiskers, was most prominent in Society, as host and as Patron of the Arts. Leopold, strongly and handsomely Jewish in appearance (as he was too in sympathy), who inherited the tastes of his Uncle Mayer, could tear himself away only reluctantly from his racing-stud. It was an ideal scheme of devolution, which avoided the slightest shadow of rivalry and allowed each of the three the possibility of developing a strongly marked individuality and creating in the public eye a distinct impression, to combine in the composite portrait of the ideal Rothschild of the Edwardian era.

But there was a great difference between the Triumvirs of the third generation and those of the second. The reason lay first and foremost in that simple change in numerical progression. They were one further stage removed from the source of their wealth. Baron Lionel and his brothers had been the sons of an immigrant father, who had amassed an enormous fortune in circumstances which, at the best, gave rise to jealousy and at the worst to

something a great deal more unpleasant. Whatever they did outside New Court, accordingly, the existence of the family was bound up in their days, in the popular mind as well as in reality, with finance. But the Second Triumvirate was different. The process which had begun when Nathan Mayer passed away reached its culmination now that they were in the saddle. The family was already acclimatized in the country, identified with English life, and to some extent even flattered the wayward English pride of achievement by the fact of its existence. If money-making was a laudable occupation (and from the middle of the nineteenth century few of the upper classes contested it), it was pleasant to think that Englishmen, even if they were Jews, could excel at it, and that English Jews could give their co-religionists overseas what was, without metaphor, a run for their money.

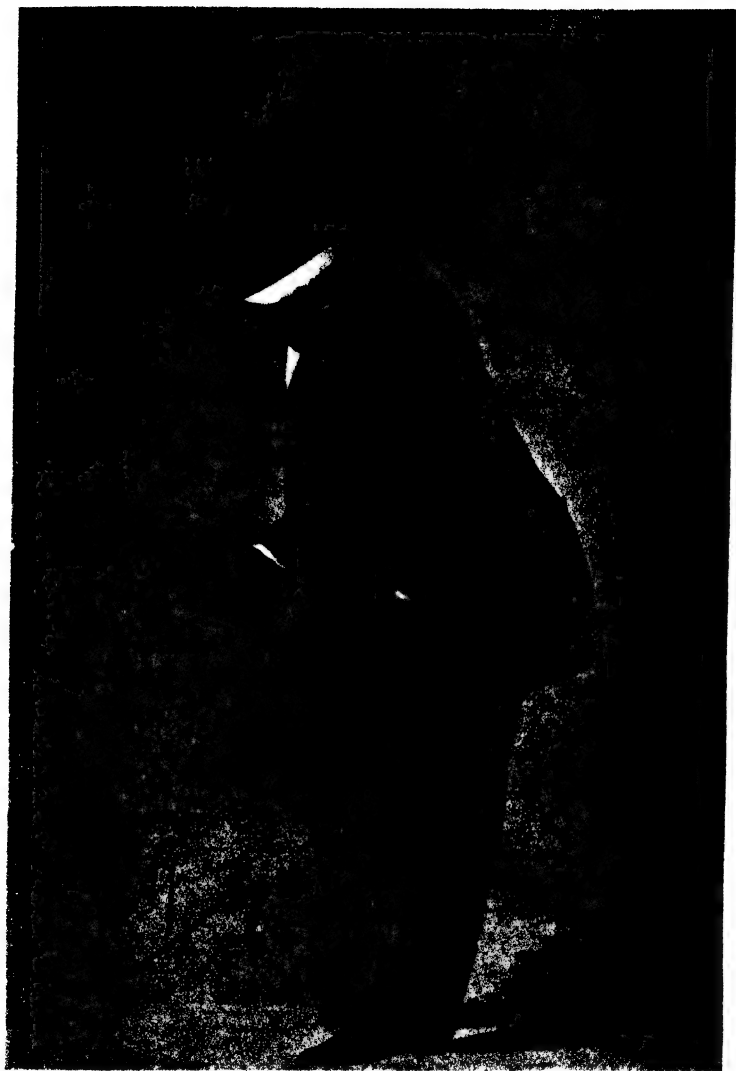
The generosity and the public spirit of the second generation had atoned in large measure for the unconventional success of the first. The third had received the normal upbringing and education of the English gentleman, shared his tastes and a good many of his prejudices, and enjoyed honours (to culminate, in 1885, in the first Anglo-Jewish peerage) which gave the head of the family formal precedence. There were by now newer *nouveaux riches* pushing their way into Mayfair, who (to adapt the Princess Murat's famous phrase) would do themselves even less harm if they tumbled off their family tree. In consequence, those of the former immigration tended to coalesce with the older, if not the oldest, nobility. True, some great houses still kept their doors closed. But when the Heir to the Throne not only admitted the Rothschild brothers to his intimacy, but even showed a



decided predilection for their company, the process reached its climax. The exclusiveness of English society was broken down. The Rothschilds had arrived.

Marriage alliances, too, had by now begun to strengthen their position in Society. Every male member of the House, to be sure, found his bride within his own community (the first breach in this tradition, so far as the English branch went, was in the reign of George V, and in the next generation but one). But the daughters of the House were less concerned with the perpetuation of the Jewish tradition. As we have seen, as early as 1839, shortly after her father's death, one of Nathan Mayer's daughters, Hannah, had married out of the faith, to the Honourable Henry Fitzroy, a son of the Earl of Southampton. The family had strongly disapproved, indeed: but nevertheless the relations between the two branches subsequently became cordial.

Hannah had embraced a new faith as well as an aristocratic husband. In this respect, the example which she set was isolated. But no one anticipated that of all the family her two nieces, the daughters of Sir Anthony, would follow even her matrimonial lead: for they had been so eager in their Jewish loyalties, and so sedulous in charity work in the East End, and had even written in collaboration a rather bad handbook of Biblical history for children, which Disraeli loyally praised. The environment in which they were brought up was, however, largely a non-Jewish one: and it was perhaps inevitable that Annie Henrietta, the younger of the two, fell in love with a young man in her set—the Honourable Eliot Yorke, son of Lord Hardwicke and for many years a dutiful Member of



“ The Winner of the Race ”  
BARON MAYER DE ROTHSCHILD  
*Caricature by “ Ape ” (Carlo Pellegrini)*



Parliament. Sir Anthony, the bride's father, was induced to give his consent to the match, though only with the greatest reluctance: and there was a double marriage-ceremony—at a London registry office and a Cambridgeshire parish church—in February 1873. A great sensation was caused by this, as it was the first time that a member of the British aristocracy had married a Jewess without her embracing his faith, while on the other hand the Jewish community was deeply pained. There was naturally less of a commotion though many regrets four years later, when, in the year after her father's death, Annie's sister, Constance, married in much the same circumstances one of her cousin Leopold's Cambridge friends, Cyril Flower—a delightful character, the only reproach against whom was that in an over-blameless youth he served as model for the hero of that repellent classic, *Eric, or Little by Little* (he was later to be a prominent Liberal politician, and was created Lord Battersea in 1892). Though they married outside the faith, both sisters retained their Jewish allegiances to a marked extent to the end; and in neither case, as it happened, was there any offspring to complicate the problem.

On the assumption that the Rothschild brothers of the second generation were all equally wealthy, the most desirable match in the House—and therefore, it was said, in England—was clearly Hannah, cousin of Sir Anthony's two girls. She was the only daughter of Baron Mayer, who had married his cousin, Juliana Cohen. Her father had died in 1874, leaving a trifle of £2,000,000. His widow followed him three years later. Hannah was at this time twenty-six years old. She owned a treasure-filled mansion in Piccadilly, a glorious country

estate in the Vale of Aylesbury, and a fortune which by the standards of those days was reckoned even more enormous than it would be now. Not that she needed them particularly as an inducement to matrimony; for she had in addition to a splendid voice, a ripe sensuous Jewish beauty ("a kind of Semiramis profile," as Lady Eastlake had phrased it) which retains its appeal even through portraits half a century old.

Only one man in England was worthy of such a prize. It was Lord Rosebery's ambition to become Prime Minister, to win the Derby, and to marry the wealthiest heiress in the land. The last object was first executed. It had been during her father's lifetime that he was introduced to Hannah by Disraeli—appropriately enough, at Newmarket. The engagement, intelligently anticipated and unintelligently reported at intervals for a couple of years past, was announced at last on the New Year of 1878: and on March 20th, in the presence of a brilliant company, they were married at Christ Church, Down Street, following a civil ceremony before the Registrar in the board-room of the workhouse in Mount Street (hardly an appropriate setting, all things considered). The Prince of Wales was among the guests: one of the daughters of Blanche Lindsay (Hannah Fitzroy's daughter) was among the bevy of lovely bridesmaids. The bride was given away by the old friend of the family, Benjamin Disraeli, then Prime Minister: and the reception which succeeded was one of the most brilliant functions of the season.

Publicity of this sort clearly attracts sometimes the attention of the wrong people: for an unsuccessful attempt was made to steal the bride's jewels

during her honeymoon. There was nothing more to mar the happiness of the match excepting its briefness: for the Countess of Rosebery died in 1890, after only twelve years of married life, three years before her husband attained his second ambition by succeeding Gladstone as Prime Minister, and four years before he executed his third object by winning the Derby for the first time. (He was to do so twice again, though fate permitted him to be Premier only once.)

Though several members of the clan had been present at the wedding, the three New Court brothers indicated by their absence their disapproval of this marriage outside the faith. Nevertheless, no family feud resulted. The two branches continued on the best of good terms: and it certainly did no harm to their position that henceforth they counted among their cousins by marriage one of the most brilliant persons in the country, a foremost figure in politics and in letters. "You are always such a true friend to all our family," Leopold had written to him, even before the marriage; and Ferdinand, their brother-in-law and cousin, was always entertaining him and writing him amusing letters as only he could. So great was the intimacy between the two families that in 1884, when Rosebery was offered the office of First Commissioner of Works, he refused as he considered that it might be embarrassing for him to enter the Cabinet while Lord Northbrook's report on Egypt—in which the Rothschilds were so deeply interested—was under discussion.

Thus, for a period of some thirty-five years, while the three brothers were at its head, from the death of Baron Lionel in 1879 down to the outbreak of the war with Germany in 1914, the House

of Rothschild enjoyed the best of both worlds: the accumulated wealth stored up by their forebears, the social distinction which they themselves had attained and the homage due to their unquestionable gifts. They were great—among the greatest—in the City. They were prominent in the Marlborough House set and in the most exclusive circles in Mayfair. They lorded it over the Vale of Aylesbury, where their country seats clustered thick. They were among the outstanding English collectors and art patrons. In their spare time, they indulged in literary and scientific recreations. Their colours were among the most successful, as well as the most popular, on the Turf. Their charity was enormous—one almost said, fantastic. They were active in, or at the very least supported, every conceivable beneficent endeavour. Their personal position was so high that they could afford to forget, or even suppress, the Austrian title of Baron, to which they had an indubitable claim—in this at least unlike their father, who had gone to such pains to be allowed to use it. In the case of the eldest and youngest of the three, they were married to fitting life-companions, who worthily and graciously seconded all their efforts. They played a part in politics, domestic and external, which was not negligible. They were the tyrants as well as the idols of their own religious community. Rothschild wealth had been notorious for half a century. Rothschild taste and Rothschild generosity were now similarly proverbial.

It was a many-sided excellence, which perhaps had no equal in its time, nor has had any parallel in modern English life. It is possible to pick up almost any of the records of the period at random—of society or of letters or of the Turf or of

politics or of art or of the stage—and there the reader will find reference after reference, generally in terms of an esteem bordering on hero-worship and seldom with any admixture of malice, of one or other of the three, if not all. Other Englishmen of the age figure more prominently. But none excelled in so many different branches, and no family equalled this astonishingly multilateral prominence. To find a parallel, it is perhaps necessary to go back to Italy of the Renaissance, to one Medici Magnifico or the other, who continued to administer a vast accumulation of wealth while at the same time throwing himself with zest into everything which went to enhance the amenities of life and the development of culture. The Magnificent Rothschilds and Lorenzo il Magnifico: the parallel is not so far-fetched as might be imagined at the first glance, and was more than once made even half a century ago.

In the City, the firm enjoyed a special position—but not only in economic life. For many decades, hardly a single list of charitable contributions was issued from Mansion House or elsewhere which did not begin with a donation from N. M. Rothschild and Sons, generally leading the way over all the rest by a handsome margin. The firm gave a Christmas present to the City Police Force, year after year. What more natural than that the burly constabulary reciprocated in a fashion which, before the days of enormous traffic-blocks and automatic signals, was at least feasible? The familiar Rothschild broughams—blue, with a thin white line round the panels of the body, and a darker hood—were familiar to all by sight, and were always allowed right of way. Even their goat (no one was sure whether it belonged to the great



mansion next to Apsley House, or to Mr. Alfred round the corner) was a public character and for years wandered up and down Piccadilly, omnivorous and unmolested, at its own sweet will.

What with one thing and another, the three magnificent brothers thus attained, even in their lifetime, an almost legendary position and fame. In the course of time, there had grown up an entire Rothschild saga, in which the family took the place of Midas of old as typifying extreme wealth, its use and misuse. The anecdotes were multitudinous: but the edges were a trifle indistinct. The geographical background varied. Stories told in London about the great Nathan Mayer Rothschild were associated in Paris with his brother James, and in Frankfort with his father, progenitor of the entire tribe. More often, the praenomen was omitted and the anecdote was fathered on "Rothschild" *tout court*, or (less abruptly but no more distinctively) on "Baron Rothschild," who might be any of a dozen contemporaries. The folk-lorist of the future, faced with this bewildering mass of similar legend, in many countries and in many tongues, should be pardoned if he decides that we have here a late but slightly materialized version of the solar myth.

Towards the close of the century, a large number of the stories were re-sired on one or another of the three heads of the London house—though not of course Heine's famous but necessarily Gallic tale of how an obsequious satellite uncovered his head reverentially as the Baron's chamber-pot was carried past (of course by two flunkeys), on the principle that even the basest effluvia of so high a genius must contain a sacred essence. There was

the story of the bumptious statesman who was ushered into Rothschild's private office on urgent business. "Take a chair," said the financier, without looking up from his desk. "You cannot have heard my name," cried the visitor, shocked at this casual treatment. "I am . . ." "Then take two chairs," said Rothschild, continuing his work. Another of the best-known of the series relates to an occasion when a Rothschild of the older generation, pressed for time, took a hackney coach (or hansom, or taxicab, according to period) and paid the driver half a crown. "Your son always gives me half a sovereign," said the driver, reproachfully, as he pocketed it. "My son has a rich father—I haven't," retorted the Baron, as he hurried away.

Again, there was the story of the socialist, who waited on Rothschild with his scheme for an equitable division of the world's wealth: the Baron gave him three shillings (or marks, or francs, according to country), equivalent to a single share, and told him to go out and enjoy it while he had the chance. Less familiar is the episode of the two particularly nauseous beggars, who were refused admission to the Rothschild mansion by the butler until they had changed their shirts. Recognizing that genius was entitled to its eccentricities, they exchanged shirts, and rang the bell again.

It was doubtless one of these two who wrote a petition to the Almighty for help and addressed it care of Rothschild, whom he imagined to be the Almighty's Vicar on earth. The recipient, deeply touched, sent him a cheque for a considerable amount, saying that it was the proceeds of an investment which the Holy One, Blessed be He,

had ordered to be made on behalf of his petitioner. "That's all very well," said the poor man's wife, when she was informed, "But who knows how much Rothschild has stuck to as commission?" Possibly it was this same person who in after years became a minor light of the financial world, and (as Heine put it) claimed that he was quite millionaire with Rothschild. One day, while out walking with a friend, he noticed the Baron's coach passing, and bowed deeply. "Why are you so reverential?" inquired his companion. "Didn't you see that the coach was empty?" "Of course I did," replied the other. "But I hope that the coachman will report what I did to the Baron." Clearly, it was this hero's wife who, after being present at a musical evening at the Rothschilds', reported to one of her cronies that they were in very much reduced circumstances, as two persons had to play on one piano.

Necessarily English, but distributed throughout the manors of Buckinghamshire, is the account of the unbelievable luxury with which the day began for those who were so fortunate as to obtain an invitation to pass the night in the house of one of the family. At the stipulated hour in the morning, the bedroom door would open and a powdered footman would enter, followed by an acolyte propelling a dumb waiter, set for all emergencies. The guest having been gently awakened, the flunkey would announce the menu:

"Tea, coffee, or a peach off the wall, sir?"

Let us assume that the guest, unprepared for such unprecedented matutinal variety, meekly opts for tea.

"China tea, India tea, or Ceylon tea, sir?"

"China, if you please," decides the stranger.

It is poured out. The Litany continues: "Lemon, milk, or cream, sir?"

The guest indicates that he will take milk: but the inquisition is not yet over:

"Jersey, Hereford, or Shorthorn, sir?"

## CHAPTER V

### NEW COURT

It was in 1810, when Nathan Mayer Rothschild had been resident in England for about twelve years, that he removed from St. Helen's Place, Bishopsgate (where Lionel, and probably Anthony, had been born) and took up his residence at Number 2, New Court, St. Swithin's Lane—one of the secluded backwaters which enabled a man to live in the heart of the City yet be a little sheltered from its incessant turmoil. It was a typical merchant's house of the period, with three stories, of which the ground floor was reserved for the counting-house and the upper two with the attics served as living quarters. The annual rental value was £96, and rates were assessed at 2d. in the pound.

The next-door house, Number 4, which was slightly smaller, was taken three years later by Moses Montefiore, Rothschild's brother-in-law and business associate. Later on, with increasing prosperity, both families followed the tide of fashion and removed to mansions in the West End, free from the implied opprobrium of business. The upper stories of their former residences were then taken over for business purposes by the firm of N. M. Rothschild and Sons, which gradually absorbed, one by one, the remaining five houses in the Court. Subsequently, the whole was rebuilt as a single block for office use. New Court, from

being the name of a residential backwater, became famous throughout the world as the stronghold of its most famous private banking-house.

With Baron Lionel's death, there was a natural devolution of activity between the three partners who now assumed control. Nathaniel was the unquestioned head of the firm, considered all new propositions, made all important decisions. Alfred, the linguist, pre-eminently a society man but a very alert financier as well, looked after external relationships. Leopold, who knew all about horse-breeding, devoted his attention to internal organization.

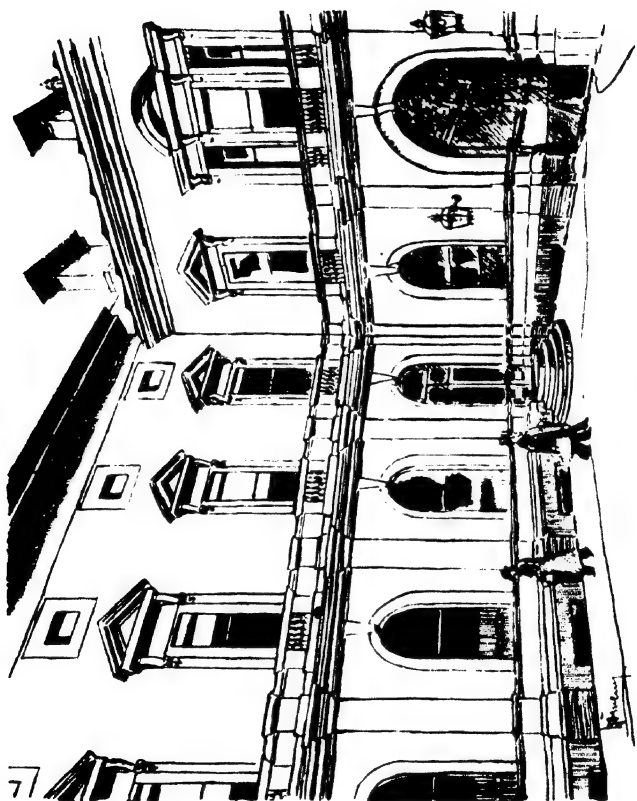
The great partners' room at New Court, with its three desks and its enormous blazing fireplace, was thus at this time the hub of many spheres, and there was a constant procession thither of the lesser magnates of creation. In the centre of the room Mr. Alfred had his place, generally (or so it seemed to the uninformed visitor) signing cheques. On the left hand, Leo beamed at all the world. But the centre of attraction was the further end of the room, where from a sort of dais Natty dominated the situation and impressed the visitor forthwith with a sense of inferiority.

Or the three might emerge for what would now be termed a Press Conference, when, sitting on one side of a table, they had to face a battery of interviewers, very reluctantly. Ultimately, they developed a special technique, or so it seemed, to save themselves from saying a syllable more than they wanted. If closely pressed, the head of the firm (in his later years at least) would hold his hand to his ear and complain of deafness. Leo would then come to his rescue, and with such charm of manner that no one liked to stop him, would refer

inquiries to his brother Alfred. The latter would airily dismiss the subject by inviting those present to have a little refreshment in the luncheon-room. The gentlemen of the Press would go away, royally regaled and with their pockets stuffed with cigars, but without having had much professional satisfaction. "Yes," said Lord Northcliffe when he was informed of the routine, "but which of the three says 'Yes' or 'No'?"

Yet New Court was one of the few areas of London which Fleet Street could not afford to neglect. For, as had been the case since the foundation of the firm, its news-service was astonishingly well-developed, this being one of the secrets of its continued pre-eminence. Many were the wires which met in that office, which was in its way a sounding-board for all Europe. The partners always knew more than could be read in the Foreign Office reports, the secret history behind the diplomatic communications, what was to be published in the newspapers the day after tomorrow and who was to write it. Even before the new generation had come into control, Disraeli referred more than once in his private letters to important and extremely confidential information received from "N. Rothschild, who knows everything"—the future peer. Not only the Government but (by now a greater compliment by far) even the Press often went to the House for information: and they were seldom disappointed.

A visit to New Court was an interesting experience. At the entrance to the courtyard, as the visitor went in from the narrow street near the Mansion House, he would be challenged in a casual sort of way by two stalwart loungers—detectives. Inside he would find loungers of a



NEW COURT  
(From a Drawing by Domény)





different sort. The hangers-on of New Court included all types of City men and not a few members of the nobility, anxious to pick up tips or to bring schemes to the notice of the firm. Brokers would come with inside information, sometimes more extravagant and sometimes less so. (A subordinate member of the firm, who kept a notebook of brokers' tips over a period of forty years, maintained that had they all been followed, Rothschilds would have been ruined four times over.) Weird wild-cat schemes innumerable were brought to the office, which was a museum of information of a curious character. The firm was not easily led into any enterprise, but it listened, and it kept its information. A man who, in the course of conversation with one of the secretaries, remarked that he knew a certain person, might be reminded of it a couple of years afterwards by a request to give full details about him, as he had just submitted some proposal to the firm. The casual mention had been carefully remembered and filed for reference.

But under the Triumvirate, the firm owed more to its tradition than to its achievements. Even though it might come into the public eye now and again in a somewhat spectacular (though eminently respectable) fashion, it was not by any means the heroic period of the House. In the days of Baron Lionel, its policy had been imaginative, though cautious. Under the direction of his three sons, it became more and more conservative—especially after the great crisis of 1890, which (as we shall see) nearly struck down the one London banking-house comparable to their own. Their social prominence and ambitions made them shun the limelight as far as possible. They were not particularly interested

in making more money. Why indeed should they be? They had enough for all reasonable, or unreasonable, purposes: and they went into fresh transactions more almost from habit, from a sense of duty, from sheer necessity of not allowing the elaborate mechanism and the vast capital which they controlled to be idle, than for the reasons which prevail with ordinary mortals.

Frank Harris tells a story which illustrates their attitude of mind. It would be flattery to the author to imagine that it is true in every detail; yet even Harris's romancings are generally founded in verisimilitude. He says that one day, shortly after Barings' had floated Guinness's Breweries as a Limited Liability Company, netting a million (*sic*) pounds thereby, he met the head of the House of Rothschild out at dinner with his old university friend, Sir Charles Dilke. Harris, who (he said) had just heard something of the inner history of the transaction from Lord Revelstoke, repeated the story as it had been told him. Lord Rothschild listened with seeming interest, and then observed, quietly:

"The Guinness promotion was offered to us first, but we refused it."

"That must cause you some regret," exclaimed Harris, "seeing that it was such a success. Even Rothschilds must think a million worth putting into their pockets."

"I don't look at it quite in that way," replied the other. "I go to the house every morning, and when I say 'No' to every scheme and enterprise submitted to me, I return home at night care-free and contented. But when I agree to any proposal, I am immediately filled with anxiety. To say 'yes' is like putting your finger in a machine—the

whirring wheels may drag your whole body in after the finger."

Harris tells another story about the Rothschilds, which lacks the plausibility of this one, even though he appeals to Dilke as his authority. It was to the effect that in the strong-room at New Court there lay a million pounds sterling, in golden sovereigns, which old Nathan Mayer had placed there, with the injunction that it should never be touched except in the greatest emergency. "Wouldn't a draft on the Bank of England be just as good, besides bringing in £30,000 a year in interest?" Baron Lionel is reported to have asked him. "No," said his father. "There are moments when you need gold, if it were for nothing but to give you the sense of security." And in the days of the founder's grandchildren, it was for security above all that the firm played.

Lavish generosity on the one side, and magnitude of operations on the other, did not signify that there was no care for trifles. It was Baron Lionel who once told a lady, anxious to discover a lucrative career for her son, that selling matches was a very good business providing that enough of them were sold. His eldest son, similarly, hearing a budding financier at Lord Orford's house suggest that the halfpenny difference in value between an Austrian and an English sovereign was not worth taking into account, informed the company that the young man in question did not seem to know much of large transactions. On another occasion, asked how a man could make money on the Stock Exchange, he replied "By selling too soon." It was a long way removed from the incredible flair of his grandfather, with reference to whom Wellington was reported to have said that Rothschild

and he both owed something of their success to the gift of knowing what was in progress on the other side of a wall.

The legendary wisdom of the Rothschilds hence reduced itself, in the third generation, to an illimitable caution. It was coupled, though, with another quality of greatness—the ability to recognize ability, to choose competent instruments and, having chosen them, to trust them. There was more than one of them about New Court—men like Joseph Nauheim, their Managing Director, a genius in business and an oyster out of it, whose advice is said to have been invaluable (not to be confused with that other Nauheim upon whom Leo relied in stable matters). At the turn of the century, Baron Léon Lambert of Brussels (who had married a daughter of Gustave de Rothschild, of Paris) had considerable influence at New Court, and City gossip suggested that it was proposed at one time to admit him to partnership. This, however, was improbable: it would have been a breach with tradition, which was not likely to be entertained even in favour of a person who had Rothschild blood in his veins. This consideration was fatal also to the claims of another subordinate of very great ability, Carl Meyer. The latter, irritated by a refusal to admit him to partnership, branched off on his own account, became a power in the City and in South African finance, and was largely instrumental in founding the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon. It was rumoured too, that at one period no member of the House, in England, Paris or Germany, ever took any important step without first asking the advice of a banker in Amsterdam, Ludwig Auerbach, a member of the firm of Becker and Fuld which the

Rothschilds had set up there as their correspondents.

In foreign enterprises, the firm still acted chiefly in connexion with their Paris house (now no more than a very friendly associate) and with August Belmont and Co., of New York, who had established himself in America in 1837 as the representative of the parent house at Frankfort. Rothschilds had an important share in the Rio Tinto copper mines, and they maintained their interest in the Spanish quicksilver mines, in which commodity they had at one time almost a monopoly. In ten years only, the firm is said to have made £1,500,000 out of this, and it was a great blow when their concession fell in and they were unable to get it renewed—not a consequence of the dawn of enlightenment, but of the discovery by the Spanish nobility that they had been allowing a juicy plum to slip through their fingers. At one period, too, their properties in the Baku fields made them be considered, rightly or wrongly, the principal competitors of the Standard Oil Company, the huge Rockefeller trust. They remained also, as they do to the present day, one of the six firms who nominally fix the price of gold in London—or rather endorse the decision already reached in that matter by the Bank of England.

It was, however, only in the Foreign Loan department that the House still upheld its old position to a certain degree. During the early years of the new Triumvirate at New Court, Rothschilds continued to be the issuers of the majority of the best foreign loans. Only of the best, it must be repeated: for it remained their tradition, as in the days of Baron Lionel—and as the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Loans was emphatically

informed in the name of the head of the firm in 1875—to avoid all business relations with profligate and ill-governed states. They had only one great rival in this class of business—Baring Brothers: but by now the rivalry was of a friendly character, and the two houses did not poach on one another's preserves or endeavour (as in the past) to bring down the prices of each other's flotations. Many important issues and conversions were carried out by the House in those days—Brazilian, Chilean, Hungarian, Italian and Swedish loans, in addition to the so-called "Tribute Loan" on behalf of Turkey. They were almost invariably successes, not only because of the firm's high prestige with the public but because it was known in the City that all of New Court's loans were gone into carefully on their inception and well looked after subsequently. Indeed, if the remittance for a coupon had not yet arrived from the debtor state, the Rothschilds nevertheless advanced the money on it.

The head of the House was chairman of the committee which recommended the creation of the Funding Loan issued in 1891 by Messrs. J. S. Morgan to pay interest on Argentine loans, then in temporary default. But the Rothschilds' own interests in South America were confined to Brazil and Chile. Both of these countries (especially the former) subsequently gave New Court much trouble, not unmingled with annoyance at the fact that their Governments broke away on more than one occasion from their old traditions and obtained money from other quarters—a course which, as a matter of fact, the best opinion in the City considered unwise. Conservative financiers, in those days, thought it a good thing that a friendly control should be exercised by old-estab-

lished houses over the finance of partially developed states; though it was natural enough for their own rulers to think otherwise when money was offered them on terms more favourable than their old friends considered safe. This breach with the established tradition was largely due to the growth of the practice of underwriting, which made it easy to bring out almost any loan—a system which New Court considered unsound, and strongly but ineffectively opposed.

In the development of the Argentine (as has been indicated) the Rothschilds had taken no part. This was probably an outcome of their prodigiously long business memory. As Paul Emden wittily puts it: "The Argentine was discovered in 1515 by Spain, in 1824 by the issuing houses of the City of London. In this year the first loan was granted, which defaulted in 1830 and continued to do so for fifty years. . . . European investors . . . may . . . have come to the conclusion that it was really not such a good and pious deed which the brave and devout mariner Juan Diaz de Solis achieved in 1515." In the 1870's, the finances of the Republic were saved from collapse by a group of London financiers, among whom the Rothschilds were conspicuous by their effacement and the Barings by their prominence; and it was therefore natural that the latter house was responsible for financing the remarkable Argentine Boom of 1886 onwards.

This developed to a fantastic extent. Lord Revelstoke, the head of the firm of Baring, lost modesty as well as caution, and conducted business of the highest importance without consulting his partners; and an Anglo-American financier, who acquired a great influence over him, induced him to use the credit of the firm to back his plans. The



last straw was a scheme for a port which was to cost £10,000,000—a trifle which Lord Revelstoke was assured that he could procure without difficulty from the public. But the public never responded, and the responsibility remained with his firm.

In the autumn of 1890 ugly rumours began to get abroad in the City of London implicating the Barings, the number of whose acceptances in circulation had (it was said) increased to a dangerous extent. At last, on November 8th, the Governor of the Bank of England was informed that the house, with liabilities running into many millions, had reached the end of its resources, and that unless immediate help were forthcoming would have to suspend payment. This would have implied not the bankruptcy of one house only, but the collapse of all credit and the ruin of half the City and a general financial crisis of unexampled magnitude.

Goschen, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, was summoned to town by the Governor of the Bank of England immediately the news became known. He decided that he could not run the risk of pledging the Treasury to a guarantee, and of being assailed in Parliament for using public money to support a private firm. But it was obvious that something had to be done, and that immediately. If public support was out of the question, the burden was thrown on private enterprise and private guarantees had to be found. The scheme, first propounded by W. H. Smith, First Lord of the Treasury (who professed his willingness to collaborate in his personal capacity to the tune of £100,000) was carried into effect under the aegis of the Bank of England, which set aside £1,000,000

out of its own funds. The bankers and merchants of London guaranteed £17,500,000 all told—a truly magnificent effort.

It had been feared that New Court might put the screw on and thus precipitate the crisis: for apart from their traditional rivalry they had an old score of their own to pay off owing to the way in which the Barings of the post-Waterloo generation had treated the founder of their firm. Hence everything depended on what the Rothschilds would do. To the relief of those in control, they responded nobly, and headed the list of guarantors, thus setting an example to the rest of the City. (The sum they subscribed must have been very large indeed, but the exact amount is mere conjecture, as the names of the guarantors and their share in the fund never became public.) But this was not all. Apart from their personal guarantee, they utilized their unrivalled international connexions, too, to the fullest extent. It was unusual for St. Petersburg to come to the aid of London; but £1,500,000 was obtained from Russia against the sale of Exchequer Bonds—a transaction in which the Rothschilds clearly took an important share, if one is to judge by the subsequent allusion to their services made by the Russian Minister of Finance. More important—indeed, all-important, for it was the largest single amount involved—was the part which they were able to play, owing to their influence in Paris, in securing a further £3,000,000 (similarly, in gold) from the Bank of France.

Thus, before the City was fully aware of what was threatening it, everything had been settled: a crisis had been checked before its real nature became known. On November 15th—precisely a week after that first anxious day—the Governor of

the Bank of England was able to announce simultaneously, not only that Barings were in difficulties but also that the steps had been taken to control the crisis. The firm's liabilities were about £21,000,000; but the guarantee fund enabled its assets to be realized gradually, at the normal market rate, without a panic which would have depreciated them irremediably. It was reconstructed as a limited liability company, and within four years had liquidated all of its commitments, without the slightest stain on its commercial reputation and without the loss of a single penny to the guarantors. What might have been the greatest disaster in the City of London in all its history was warded off without any more serious result than momentary anxiety and a fall in Consols.

The share of the House of Rothschild was cordially recognized by the Governor of the Bank of England when addressing a City meeting shortly after the event. "When you thank the Bank of England," he said, "it is very important to bear in mind the willing and cheerful aid that we have received from others, in the first place from Lord Rothschild, whose influence with the Bank of France was of such assistance to us in obtaining those means without which we could not have rendered the aid we were enabled to give."

The magnitude of the crisis of 1890 (coming as it did hard on the heels of the Brazilian revolution of 1889) had a perceptible effect on the mentality of New Court. The three partners were by now no longer young men, to whom risk-taking and profit-making went hand in hand. Henceforth their key-note was, above all, caution. Hence, after this period, New Court was less active as an

issuing house than it had previously been, and little new business was undertaken. Nothing was begun unless all three partners were in thorough agreement: and, just as a regiment marches at the pace of the slowest man, so the least hesitation on the part of any one of the three brothers was enough to secure the rejection of a proposal. It was for this reason that, contrary to expectation, the Rothschilds took no share in (for example) the financing of China in the 1890's, when they might have been expected to assume the lead. Some persons qualified to judge were of the opinion that as a money centre London, though still enormously powerful, was not so powerful as it would have been if Rothschilds had thought fit to initiate and control some of the big new business of the last years of the reign of Queen Victoria and of the Edwardian era. But it may be that London was the safer for this conservative attitude adopted by the brothers. At any rate, it may be said with confidence that, if there was an error, it was on the right side.

In two directions, within the orbit of Imperial affairs (and precisely for this reason) Rothschild interests nevertheless remained strong: in South Africa and in Egypt. The House had long been interested behind the scenes, together with the Mosenthals, in the London and South African Exploration Company, which played a very important part in opening up South African industry, well before the fabulous days of Diamonds and Gold. But at the close of the century, they first became associated with the more spectacular new developments.

There is a certain dramatic quality in the story of how they entered seriously into the South African lists. A titanic struggle was going on at the

time between the little cockney Jew, Barney Barnato, and Cecil Rhodes, son of a Hertfordshire rector, for the control of the South African diamond industry. The conflict centred upon the control of a Kimberley concern called the French Company, ownership of which would determine the predominance in the industry and decide the conflict (and perhaps in the long run the history of South Africa) as a whole. Barnato seemed to be winning, for Rhodes did not have sufficient capital at his command to realize his extravagant dreams. The latter determined in the end to go to London, and in London all financial roads led to New Court, where he obtained an interview without loss of time. He saw the head of the firm, and the head of the firm approved of him. But the decisive word was spoken only after Rhodes had left the room, when Lord Rothschild said to one of the applicant's companions: "You may tell Mr. Rhodes that if he can buy the French Company I think I can raise the money."

It was a gigantic sum which was in question—no less than £1,400,000: but it was forthcoming. The French Company was bought out, and Barnato's resistance undermined. In the end, he too succumbed, receiving as his reward (besides for safety's sake a *life* Governorship in the new company), Rhodes' backing for a seat in the Cape Parliament, and the membership of the Kimberley Club which he so coveted. (Rhodes, on the other hand, had his vanity flattered by being brought a bucket of diamonds!) The final cheque that passed to the Barnato group was for £5,338,650: and the De Beers Consolidated Mines, with a representative of the House of Rothschild on the board in the person of Carl Meyer, thus came into

existence. It was, for those interested in such things, a curious combination: the son of the English rector being enabled by the great Jewish banking-house to deprive a Jew of his hegemony in the South African diamond industry. "Jewish Financial Solidarity" is clearly a fabrication of disordered minds.<sup>1</sup>

It was a natural outcome of the acquisition of the Suez Canal shares that the House of Rothschild became particularly interested in Egyptian affairs, from which they had previously held, very wisely, aloof. During the years following that transaction, the finances of the country got into worse and worse confusion. Egypt could perhaps have borne the burden of the immense loans forced upon her ruler by European finance if the rate of interest charged had been reasonable. Three obstacles thus militated against solvency: the dissipation of the Khedive, the absence of any organization to control him, and the rapacity of financial Europe. French capitalists as well as British being largely interested in the country, France joined the United Kingdom in securing the deposition of Ismail Pasha, the appointment of his son Tewfik in his place, and the superintendence of Egypt's finances and administration generally by what was known as the "Condominium" for international control (pertinently dubbed by Rosebery "international chaos").

It was in these difficult circumstances that the Rothschilds became increasingly concerned in the reform of Egyptian finance during the late 70's and 80's—above all in the ten troublesome years

<sup>1</sup> Later, Rothschilds provided the money for the railway into Rhodesia from the East Coast. In a letter to Harcourt, of May 15th, 1896, Rhodes referred a little wistfully to "that smoking-room at Rothschilds" in which he imagined the other to be lounging.

between 1878 and 1888, when their services both to Egypt and to England were conspicuous.

While the Powers were quarrelling about their rights and claims, Egypt was threatened with utter bankruptcy. This was averted when the Rothschilds advanced the Egyptian Treasury large sums, amounting in the end to £1,000,000 sterling, on their own responsibility, without any legal security other than a private note from the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville. It was a courageous and public-spirited action, but for which a major disaster might have ensued. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, in his capacity as Chancellor of the Exchequer, testified to the fact subsequently in a speech in the House of Commons: and when very shortly after the head of the House was raised to the peerage, it was generally understood to be in recognition of his public services on this occasion, and in the subsequent events.

It was not unnatural that the firm which had taken the risks was given the opportunity to make the profits. As a first step in the financial rehabilitation of the country, the Rothschilds issued in London and Paris in 1878 £8,500,000 Five Per Cent Egyptian State Domain Mortgage Bonds at £73 per cent. (The redemption of this was completed in 1913, the interest having been reduced from 5 per cent to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent in 1893). This achievement, which put Egypt back on the path of orthodox finance, was followed in 1885 by the Egyptian Three Per Cent Sterling Loan, guaranteed by all the Great Powers, for £9,424,000. It was an outstanding success. St. Swithin's Lane, on the morning of the issue, was one seething mass of humanity; New Court was unapproachable; and, very soon after the doors were opened, the whole

issue was over-subscribed. (It was not on this occasion, though, but on another similar one that the partners had to enter their office through a window.) In 1890 the firm arranged the conversion of the Five Per Cent Preference Loan into a Three-and-a-Half Per Cent Loan, and the repayment of the Four-and-a-Half Per Cent Loan which they had issued in 1888.

On the other hand, there were not many domestic enterprises of first importance in which the House of Rothschild was concerned. An exception must be made in the case of Vickers, the great armament concern, with the managing director of which their right-hand man, Joseph Nauheim, was on terms of great personal intimacy. When at the time of their extension Vickers needed further capital, Nauheim interested the Rothschilds, and the association which resulted was for a time of some importance. It was presumably in connexion with this enterprise that Lord Rothschild wanted Admiral "Jackie" Fisher to become the head of "a great armament and ship-building combine." The latter was, however, persuaded by Lord George Hamilton, who had other plans in store for him, to refuse, with the result that the entire scheme fell through: and it was perhaps in consequence of this that the Rothschilds subsequently relinquished their leadership in the reconstructed firm to another member of the Royal Enclosure, Sir Ernest Cassel.

Success was counterbalanced by at least one outstanding failure. In 1886, Rothschilds attempted to float (the word somehow seems wrong in this connexion) the Manchester Ship Canal, but were completely unsuccessful. In the following year, however, they tried again—this time in conjunction



with Barings: and on this occasion local patriotism in Lancashire resulted in an outstanding success. When the National Penny Bank failed, a pyrrhic victory was secured by the head of the House who, being one of its guarantors, mitigated the losses of the depositors out of his own pocket. The Rothschilds' reputation for financial invulnerability suffered a blow: but their reputation for probity was enhanced. There were other occasions when a run on a bank was stopped by the intervention of the Rothschilds: for the knowledge that their help was forthcoming almost invariably restored public confidence.

Abroad, the reputation of New Court was not what it had been, though far from negligible. Count Metternich, the German Ambassador in London, reported confidentially on its position to the German Foreign Minister on June 2nd, 1903:

The London House enjoys a great prestige, it is true, owing to its history, but for many years no new business has come its way, and it contents itself with the safe investment of its wealth. For a long time it has ceased to undertake foreign loans on a large scale: the only exception being in the case of Brazil, to which country it occasionally lends money. Other important firms here, such as the Barings, are much more appropriate for the purpose than the Rothschilds, but these even if they were willing would not be competent to float a loan.

In part, this adverse opinion (echoed by other German observers, such as Count Munster, Ambassador in Paris, after having been for many years representative at the Court of St. James's) was in the category of sour grapes: for New Court on its

side was not particularly enamoured of Germany, partly because of its perpetual sabre-rattling, a constant menace to the peace of Europe, and partly (it was said) because of the social discrimination from which even then Jews suffered in Germany, and from which they themselves had not been immune. The head of the House, the London Embassy reported, felt that he had been badly treated by the German Government: and the London Embassy definitely felt that something should be done to placate him and dissipate any ill-feeling.

On the other hand, it certainly does not appear as though New Court allowed its general policy to be influenced by personal rancour. It rendered valuable services to the German Treasury as mediators in the difficulties which arose with the Bank of England, and in other matters: and Alfred, who fancied himself not a little as a diplomat, exerted himself to the utmost (as will be seen) to smooth away any ill-feeling between his country and his great-grandfather's and to pave the way for a lasting accord.

Sometimes, New Court's longing for peace coloured its outlook upon realities and nullified the advantage conferred upon it by its remarkable intelligence service. In 1903, for example, shortly before Christmas, Alfred de Rothschild gave a dinner-party at which his two brothers, with Baron von Eckardstein, Secretary to the German Embassy, and the Duke of Devonshire, then Lord President of the Council, were among the guests. The last-named was convinced that war between Russia and Japan was imminent. Leopold held the opposite view, wagering a walking-stick that nothing of the sort would take place for five years. Eckardstein

shortly after told the Japanese Ambassador, Count Hayashi, about the wager. The latter rejoined that the Duke would win, as he did not believe that any peaceful solution to the problem was possible: but he was laughing at the time, and it was not obvious whether he intended his statement seriously or no. Nevertheless, Eckardstein wrote to Alfred telling him about it, and the latter in turn (though not to save the price of the walking-stick) tried to convince his brothers.

Not long after, Count Hayashi himself was at Alfred's and tried to persuade him, as representing the firm, to give Japan financial support. There were two objections against entertaining the application. One was that the good-will of the British Government was desirable, if not essential. But that was the time when Japan was regarded as the England of the Far East, and an alliance was imminent: and the Foreign Office had no objection. The other obstacle was more serious. In accordance with its immemorial practice, the House of Rothschild lent for peace only, not for war. The Japanese had to content themselves therefore with an assurance of the general sympathy of the House of Rothschild, the question of financial support being left over for consideration. This was the key to a minor journalistic mystery of the time. Not many months later, hostilities started: and a telegram was received at New Court from the Far East to the effect that a great naval battle had been fought in the Straits of Tsushima, and the Russian fleet had been overwhelmingly defeated. Alfred, in whose province foreign affairs as a whole lay, told the story over the telephone to the *Daily Mail* (not then what it was to become later on) which, unable to obtain corroboration but none

the less relying on New Court's reputation for infallibility, published the news with flaring headlines. It was only two days later that official confirmation was received at the Japanese Embassy from the Tokio Government, who were anxious to impress the House of Rothschild with the fact that their ultimate success was certain and that they might lend with complete confidence.

But, notwithstanding occasional excursions into new fields, New Court under the sons of Baron Lionel preferred to cultivate the old ones. The House survived largely on the momentum of its past: and there was an increasing tendency—less pronounced perhaps in England than in the Continental branches of the Rothschilds—to turn the banking-house into mere administrative offices for the investment of the capital accumulated in the previous lucrative decades.

It devolved, however, on New Court to collaborate at this period in the pious work of performing the last sad rites over its progenitor. The famous parent House of M. A. von Rothschild und Soehne of Frankfort-on-Main, whence the Five Frankforters had sallied forth to conquer the world, had successfully withstood the storms of politics, of economics and of genealogy for over a century. The last were, in this respect, the most important: for Amschel Mayer, the eldest of the five brothers and the only one to remain in his birth-place, was the only one also to leave no posterity. His death, in 1855, had coincided with the waning of the fortunes of the Kingdom of Naples, where his youngest brother Karl had established himself. He was succeeded therefore, in default of issue of his own, by two of Karl's surplus sons—the misanthropic Mayer Karl, Natty's father-in-law, and

his hyper-orthodox brother, Wilhelm (universally known as "Baron Willy"), who invented observances of his own when those prescribed by tradition were not rigorous enough and used to refuse to shake hands even with a friend, or to touch a door with his hand, for fear of contracting a Levitical impurity. (It was said that this was a sort of perpetual atonement for having been tempted to apostasize in his youth by an over-zealous Jesuit tutor.)

In 1861 the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was snuffed out by Garibaldi, and the former royal family retired to Paris. Thither went too, to form part of their shadow Court, Adolph Rothschild, Karl's other son, who saw no point in keeping his banking-house at Naples open and remained loyal to the Bourbons to the end. Thus the first breach in the legend was made, and the famous five branches of the House of Rothschild were reduced to four.

In 1886, Mayer Karl, for thirty years head of the Frankfort House, was found dead, bent over a column of figures. His marvellous collection of silver was divided among the children whose unmitigated femininity had been such a disappointment to him: the control of the banking-house passed to his brother, Baron Willy, who devoted to it all the time he could spare from praying and book-collecting. But he was not very interested in it, save from a sense of duty: its transactions became more and more mechanical, less and less extensive: there was no son to help him or to succeed him: and none of the many Rothschilds of the younger generation, happy in Paris, Vienna or London, showed the slightest inclination to go back to the cradle of the family simply for the sake

of carrying on an historic tradition—not even when the Kaiser himself used his personal powers of persuasion. Accordingly, when Baron Willy himself died, in 1901, there was no alternative but to wind up the bank's affairs. The responsibility devolved on the most prominent members of the London and Paris Houses, sons-in-law of Mayer Karl and of Wilhelm respectively: and it was by them that the historic circular was sent out in April 1901:

It is our sad duty to inform you that in consequence of the decease of Baron Wilhelm Karl von Rothschild, the Banking-House of M. A. von Rothschild und Soehne will go into liquidation. The Liquidators are (1) The Right Hon. Nathan Mayer, Lord Rothschild, London, (2) Baron Edmond de Rothschild, Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the second breach was made in the great tradition. The Five were now reduced to Three. And, thirty-six years later, with the rape of Austria, the Vienna House also fell—catastrophically, this time, though unlike its destroyers it maintained its honour—and the Three were reduced to Two.

It is clear that the time is not yet come, even were the opportunities available, to write in detail the history of New Court under the Triumvirate of the third generation of the House of Rothschild in England. From the outline which has been given above, however, it is clear that when that history is written there will be in it little of the gripping quality, the high adventure, the splendid audacity

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for the text of this circular as well as for many other details to Paul H. Emden's recent work, *Money Powers of Europe*—a mine of information on many subjects.

of the days of Nathan Mayer, their grandfather, founder of the London firm. It is as the background and the ultimate motive-force behind the three magnificent brothers that New Court had its real importance at this period. Natty, Alfred and Leo: Duty, Exquisiteness, and Benevolence.

## CHAPTER VI

### NATTY

BEARDED: a trifle below the average height, and inclining later on to portliness; doggedly monolingual: deep-voiced, giving the impression of gruffness: always fastidiously dressed, and sporting a flower (frequently an exotic one) in his button-hole: supremely conscious of the importance of being a Rothschild: humourless, notwithstanding a large store of Jewish anecdotes: extremely definite in his opinions, and correspondingly intolerant of opposition: decided as a young man and irascible as an old one: in his later days, conveniently deaf: yet from first to last characterized in all things by a strong sense of duty and a supreme devotion to it—such was Nathan Mayer de Rothschild, generally called Nathaniel and known to his intimates as Natty.

He was in his fortieth year, with the inherited knowledge and aptitudes which members of a great business family acquire almost unconsciously from early youth, added to the wide practical experience derived from many years' close association with its actual work, that he succeeded his father in 1879 as head of the House of Rothschild in England. In the early seventies, when Baron Lionel began to take a less active part in affairs, he came to be recognized as the foremost member of the firm. When the Select Committee on Loans to Foreign States was set up in 1875, he (not his father) was



summoned to give evidence before it, as representing the most influential Foreign Loan house in the City. It was on this occasion that he pitted his wits for the first time, though not for the last, against Sir Henry James, later Lord James of Hereford.

It is somewhat amusing to read over his evidence and to see how even at this time, when he was in the middle thirties, he had already all the forthrightness and the self-assurance that men were to associate with him in his intolerant old age. His depositions were free neither from humour nor from arrogance. To the question: "What is your opinion as to the disease?" he answered bluntly, "I should say that the disease is the desire of people to get a high rate of interest for their money." "I disapprove very much of the practices," he observed at another stage of the proceedings. "But I do not think those practices have anything to do with the negotiation of loans in general. The money, so far as I can make out, has been misappropriated": an answer which could not do much for the enlightenment of the members of the Committee. He verged on discourtesy later on. He had no suggestions to offer, he said: and he came "not to suggest remedies, but to criticize the remedies which have been proposed." In fact he had no illusions as to the outcome of the proceedings. Here, as so often, he was right, for the Select Committee completely failed of the purpose for which it had been set up.

He maintained very much the same attitude in his evidence before the subsequent Royal Commission on the Stock Exchange, which he maintained to be fundamentally sound in its organization notwithstanding regrettable lapses from time

to time on the part of irresponsible individuals. He had, moreover, been very intimately associated with all the more important transactions carried out by New Court in recent years—especially the acquisition of the Suez Canal shares; was prominent in Society and had influential friends among statesmen both in England and abroad; and thus long before he became head of the family was very much in the public eye.

In 1876, on the death of his uncle Anthony, the baronetcy which Baron Lionel had refused devolved upon him, by special remainder: and it was as Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild that he was known for several years. His position in the country was further strengthened by his political position. He had entered the House of Commons in 1865, when he was only twenty-five years old, as member for Aylesbury—a constituency which continued to return him with semi-feudal fidelity, at election after election. Though (like all the members of his family) he was by no means a Rupert of debate, he was far from being merely an inarticulate backbencher, and was considered an authority on financial questions throughout the twenty years during which he remained in the Lower House.<sup>1</sup>

His membership was not terminated by the fickleness of the electorate (a contingency which

<sup>1</sup> According to some of the contemporary works of reference, he was privileged to play a part in the internal politics of more than one country, having figured in 1867, mysteriously and temporarily, as a member of the German Parliament. If he did, it was only a passing episode, chiefly significant as a perplexity for future generations of historians. It is probable though that the statement is the result of the unintelligent abbreviation of an account of the outstanding episodes in his life, in which it was recorded that he "married Emma Louisa, daughter of Baron Mayer Karl von Rothschild, Member of the German Parliament, 1867." The last clause, it seems, was detached from its context and referred to Nathaniel, instead of to his father-in-law. It is nevertheless symptomatic of indifference to such matters in high places that the statement was allowed to remain in at least one annual publication for some twenty years, without protest or alteration.

he never had to envisage), but by something more momentous and less displeasing. Notwithstanding the fact that Lord Shaftesbury had twice urged that a peerage should be conferred on the veteran Jewish baronet and philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, it was in 1869, during Gladstone's first Ministry, that the idea of raising a Jew to the Upper House was first seriously entertained. It is hardly necessary to add that the head of the House of Rothschild was the person in question. It was barely ten years since Baron Lionel had fought his way into the Commons, and it was not perhaps unreasonable to imagine that the time was premature for him to be thrust into the Lords. But, before others had an opportunity of passing their opinion on the matter, opposition was voiced by the Queen herself (in some respects a worthy niece of King William IV, who, in receiving a new Bishop for the first time, inquired anxiously whether he was "sound" on the Jew question, and could be relied upon to vote against Emancipation). She stated her objection in forthright Hanoverian style on August 22nd, 1869, to Lord Granville, who was in waiting on her at Balmoral but communicated with her nevertheless mainly by letter. "To make a Jew a Peer," she wrote to him, "is a step she could not consent to. It would be ill taken and would do the Government great harm."

In his reply Granville, apparently with more loyalty than enthusiasm, urged the Prime Minister's view. "The notion of a Jew peer is startling," he said. "'Rothschild, le premier Baron Juif' does not sound as well as 'Montmorency, le premier Baron Chrétien'—but he represents a class whose influence is great by their wealth, their intelligence, their literary connections." He added that it would

be wise to attach the financial interest in the City of London to the Crown, instead of running the risk of driving it into the extremist camp (then hotly Republican) in Politics. But the Queen was unmoved. It was the first check that Gladstone had received from this quarter: and he retired with as good grace as possible:

10, Downing Street,  
October 28th, 1869.

. . . As the head of the great European house of the Rothschilds, even more than by his vast possessions, and his very prominent political position after having represented the City of London since the year 1847, Baron L. de Rothschild enjoys exactly that *exceptional* position, which disarms jealousy, and which is so difficult to find. His amiable and popular character needs only to be named as a secondary recommendation.

It would not be possible, in this view, to find any satisfactory substitute for his name. And if his religion were to operate permanently as a bar, it appears that this would be to revive by prerogative the disability which formerly existed by statute, and which the Crown and Parliament thought proper to abolish.

Mr. Gladstone has now troubled Your Majesty to the full extent incumbent upon him, and will not think of pressing Your Majesty beyond what Your Majesty's impartial judgment may approve.

Her Majesty's impartial judgment did not approve. She could not think, she said, that one who owed his wealth to contracts with foreign governments for loans, or to successful speculations on the Stock Exchange (surely no more blame-

worthy in fact than rack-renting, or successful speculation in land!) could fairly claim a British peerage: nor could she divest her mind of the feeling against making a person of the Jewish religion a peer. And that was very decidedly that.

It was Victoria's greatest quality as a ruler that she was able to move with the times, even though she generally managed to lag a little way behind them: and in the course of the next seventeen years her attitude in this matter altered. Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild, the second Baronet, was after all a generation further removed from the ghetto; his fortune was not quite so redolent of its origin; he had been at Cambridge with her own son, through whose influence he was accepted by the most exclusive society. It is probable that her intercourse with Dizzy had something to do with the matter, too: for it was impossible for the sovereign to be quite so determined in her objection to a peer who was a Jew by religion when for years past her greatest delight had been in the society of a Prime Minister who had been a Jew by birth. Moreover, New Court was by now become something of a British Institution, and had repeatedly performed valuable services for the Government and the country—those at the time of the purchase of the Suez Canal shares, and again more recently during the Egyptian Crisis, were common knowledge.

This last consideration was decisive: and whether *propter hoc* or merely *post hoc*, in 1885 Gladstone (about to resign office for the third time) once more recommended the head of the House of Rothschild for a peerage. Whether he met with any opposition on this occasion is thus far unknown. But the name of Nathaniel Mayer Roth-

schild figured that year in the Dissolution honours, being elevated to the dignity of a Baron of the United Kingdom.

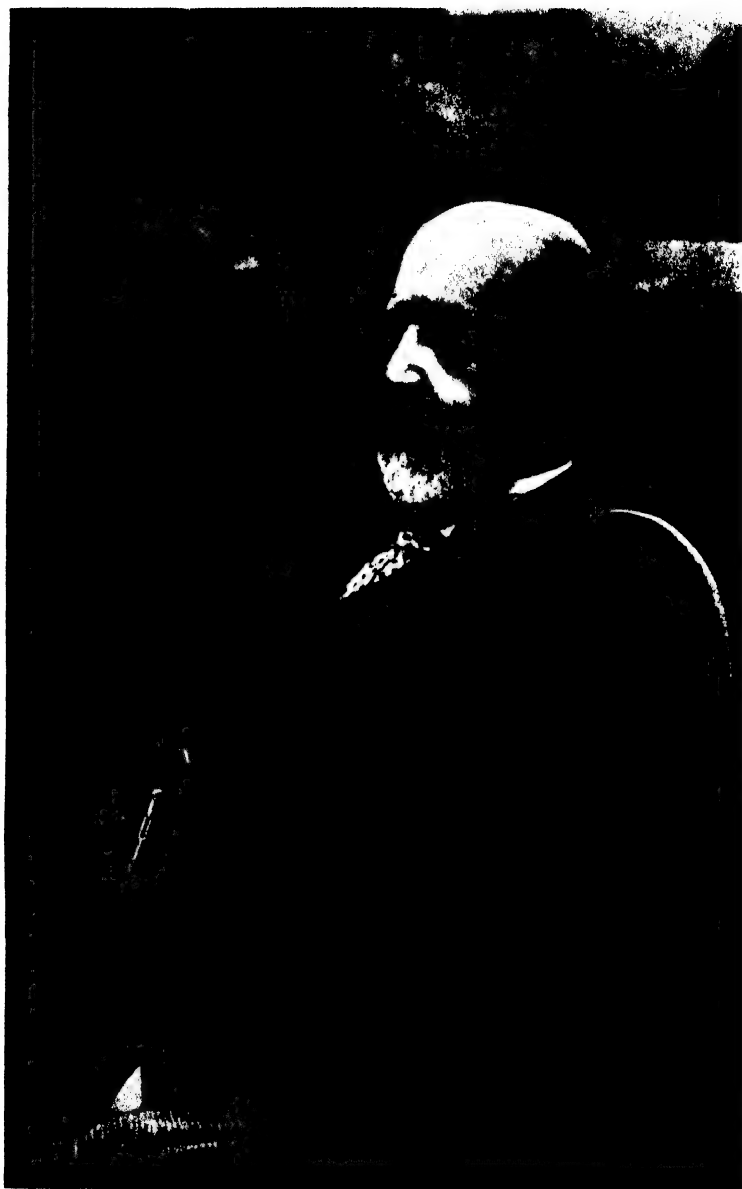
It was symptomatic of the aroma which by now surrounded the family name that the new Peer did not take a territorial designation, but chose to be known as Lord Rothschild. On Thursday, July 9th, he took his seat in the House of Lords. It was an historic scene. His supporters were the Earl of Rosebery—till recently Foreign Secretary, and his cousin by marriage—and Lord Carrington, afterwards Marquess of Lincolnshire. Nothing of the strictest Jewish ceremonial was neglected. Before taking the oath, the new Peer put on his three-cornered hat, and produced a Hebrew Bible of his own: and it was on this that he swore, in a suitably modified form of words. It was the first time that the Peers of the Realm had looked on while one of their number took the oath covered, or on another book than that which Christian practice and English tradition prescribed.

This glamorous promotion made a great deal of difference in the status of the English Rothschilds. To the outside world it meant that the seal of royal approval had been placed on the House and on its Head, who now could take his place in the ranks of the hereditary baronage of England. Among English Jews, the new development was greeted with almost delirious joy. Thirty years before, when the Lords were still systematically blocking the entry of the new Peer's father into the House of Commons, it had hardly seemed possible that this final development could take place so soon. The emancipation of the Jews in England was at last really complete. And there was no question henceforth that, among English Jews, for the next

thirty years at least, the Head of the House of Rothschild was foremost. It was not a question only of the offices which he held in the Jewish community, but of the fact that he, first and (for some time) alone of his co-religionists, had been singled out for this outstanding honour. And this insular attitude was reflected too among Jews abroad. Hitherto, there had been many rich men, and several Rothschilds—the best part of them (including indeed, in point of fact, Nathaniel himself, though he preferred to keep it quiet) Barons. But what was an Austrian Barony compared with an English Peerage? It almost seemed as though the Queen of England had revived in favour of the head of the English House the ancient dignity of the Jewish Exilarch in Baghdad of old, with his mounted retinue and his silken robe of office and his place among the great ones of the state.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, after that July day in 1885, Nathaniel Mayer, Lord Rothschild, was the unofficial but yet acknowledged lay head of the Jews throughout the world, as well as of those of England. At any time of crisis, he was expected to do something, and generally did: when anything went wrong, he invariably received the blame: he was expected to support every endeavour, to accept every Presidency and to say the right thing whenever the right thing had to be said. Foreign scholars would land cheerfully in England with nothing but a manuscript and twopence-halfpenny in their pockets, in the profound conviction that Lord Rothschild would see to their future. In return, he received, not so much devotion (for that is a qual-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Rothschild was, in fact, in Baghdad in 1894, when he was received with almost as much deference as his prototype and was presented with an illuminated Bible manuscript in Hebrew written in Spain in the fourteenth century.



THE FIRST LORD ROTHSCHILD





ity impossible in argumentative Jews) as apotheosis: and in the East End of London and the teeming ghettos of Eastern Europe, he became a legend in his lifetime.

From his earliest youth, "Natty" had been on terms of intimacy with Disraeli, a constant visitor at his father's house: and, when he grew up, the intimacy developed into a warm personal friendship. "Natty was very affectionate about you, and wanted me to come home and dine with him; quite alone; but I told him that you were the only person now, whom I could dine with," the statesman wrote to Mary Anne during her last illness. "N. Rothschild . . . told me yesterday about the coming art(icle) in *The Times*," he informed Lady Bradford three years later: sure evidence that the friendship did not restrict itself to an interchange of social courtesies. So great in fact was the esteem with which the statesman regarded his old friend's son that he appointed him an executor of his will together with his old friend Sir Philip Rose, who had charge of his affairs ever since 1846. Subsequently the trustees of the estate came into the possession also of the great mass of Disraeli papers which had been bequeathed to Monty Corry, now Lord Rowton. It was in the Rothschild vaults at New Court, therefore, that there was stored a great part of the documentary material on which Monypenny and Buckle subsequently based their monumental *Life of Disraeli*, in the genesis of which the Head of the House played an important share (for it was only after the death of the leisurely Monty that the enterprise really got under weigh). Much of the material was of an extremely intimate nature; and in 1907, when it was thoroughly examined for the first time, several packages of

“very private” letters from Queen Victoria were sent by Lord Rothschild to King Edward, who, with more regard to the reputation of his family than the curiosity of posterity, had them destroyed forthwith.

In view of this close personal intimacy, it was a little surprising that in politics “Natty” was to be found on the opposite side to the man who had been the close friend of his family during two generations. It was as a follower of Gladstone, not of Disraeli, that he sat in the House of Commons for twenty years as Member for Aylesbury: and it was as a Liberal that he was elevated to the House of Lords, where he took his place with grim determination on the Liberal benches. The reason for this has been indicated above. It was simply that in the third quarter of the nineteenth century Jews could hardly fail to adhere loyally to the party which had been responsible for their emancipation. Nevertheless, when the Liberal Unionist split took place in the 1880’s, and Joseph Chamberlain led his followers over, first to the purlieus and ultimately to the headquarters of the Conservative camp, a good many Jews went with him, with the Rothschilds marching solidly at their head. Henceforth, English Jewry was more impartially distributed between the two political parties. It is true that, as before, the family maintained their cordial relationships with the other side—in 1888, Nathaniel’s mansion in Piccadilly was said to be the only Unionist house in London in which the Gladstones dined. But, henceforth, the members of the family were consistently Unionist, whether in the Commons or the Lords: and when in the post-war period a scion of the French family entered Parliament as a Liberal, and a grandson of the first Peer

was rumoured to adhere to more extreme ideas, it came almost as a shock to those who had forgotten the historic tradition of the nineteenth century.

As a member of the House of Commons, "Natty" had adhered to the family tradition in one characteristic detail, as has been mentioned before. He was a silent member, and whatever influence he exerted was behind the scenes. But, after the General Election of 1906, the advanced programme of the Asquith Government drew him from the position of comparative reserve he had previously maintained in political matters, and he appeared on the platform as a particularly vehement opponent of Liberal legislation, especially in the field of finance. He took a leading part in the demolition of the Licensing Bill of 1908, and he presided impressively at the solemn meeting of brewery debenture holders which turned the tide against the Government. While strongly opposing all the suggested items of expenditure on such unimportant trifles as Old Age Pensions, he was one of the leaders of those who assailed the Government on the question of the naval estimates, maintaining that this was the one branch of the administration in which the economy on which they insisted elsewhere should not be exercised. The great reputation which he enjoyed in financial matters enabled him to speak with seeming authority when he threw himself into the lists in opposition to Mr. Lloyd George's Budget of 1909, opposing the increased expenditure on social services with a stern determination, unmingled with self-sacrifice.

It was not perhaps very wise on his part to expose himself to the full broadside of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, then at the height of his brilliant vituperative powers. (It was the style which the

jealous Conservatives, unable to imitate it, disdainfully styled "Limehouse".) "I really think we are having too much Lord Rothschild" the latter stated amid laughter, at a meeting at the Holborn Restaurant on June 24th, 1909, alluding principally to the other's speech at a City meeting on All Fools' Day, when he had moved a resolution in favour of increased expenditure on armaments. "Are we to have all the ways of reform, financial and social, blocked, simply by a notice-board: 'No Thororoughfare. By Order of Nathaniel Rothschild'?"

In the following winter came the General Election, and the interchange of discourtesies continued. Addressing a great Nonconformist rally at the Queen's Hall on December 16th, the Chancellor of the Exchequer made a reference, not in the best of taste, to "the Philistines, who are not all uncircumcized." What he would have said next is unrecorded, as a suffragist raised a disturbance at this point and was ejected with some force: it was known at the time only by the Almighty and the orator, and the latter has doubtless forgotten. But it was reported that the burden of the statement had been that a time might come when an English Minister might have to expatriate five or six million Philistines, and that those who had been initiated into the Abrahamic covenant would not be exempted. It was a heaven-sent opportunity. During a speech a few days after in support of the Conservative candidate at St. Georges-in-the-East, a constituency where the Jewish vote counted for something, Lord Rothschild had the chance to wax indignant about this assault, not on himself alone but on the Jewish people as a whole. He did so, quite effectively. But his rejoinder lost not only its force but also its *raison d'être* when he

received a letter from Mr. Lloyd George denying that he had said anything of the sort. The peer made a handsome and complete withdrawal, which is said to have affected the Chancellor quite deeply. He had often been assailed without justification, the latter said: but this was the first occasion when his opponent had the decency to apologize.

By this time, Lord Rothschild was regarded as the financial oracle of the Conservative Party: and in his old age his advice did not always tend towards moderation. He even went so far as to recommend the rejection of the Parliament Bill by the Lords. If the Government resigned, a Conservative minority administration might be formed and could carry on until the next election. But what of financial supplies for the essential work of administration, if the Commons were hostile? Jangling his keys in his pocket, he said, a little vaguely, that the City could be counted on to advance an adequate sum, pending a new election, and the return of a more moderate majority. It was curious advice to hear from one who had been nurtured on the purest milk of nineteenth-century Liberalism; indeed, men have been impeached for less.

Notwithstanding these outside interests, the Head of the House of Rothschild could not help being pre-eminently a City man. There was a sort of ancestor worship in his vigilance in maintaining the fortunes of the fabric which his predecessors had reared, at no lower level than theirs. One of the minor spectacles of London was to see him regularly on 'Change, at the appointed hour, at the same spot where in their day his forefathers had stood, though for commercial purposes his attendance had long been purely formal.

His advice was always at the service of the Government of the country, whatever its political complexion might be, and the vast experience which he had accumulated during a lifetime in the City made it inevitable that he was consulted at any time of perplexity. He was strongly in favour (and this time his old rival, Lord Revelstoke, was in fullest agreement with him) of the acquisition by Great Britain of the ordinary shares of the Baghdad Railway. Upon this matter, the German Government had tried to ascertain the British attitude through New Court, which learned from an authoritative source that England did not wish to have anything to do with it, though not anxious for any other Power to do so. Had Lord Rothschild's advice been followed, the course of affairs in the Near East, in the second decade of the century, would have been radically different.

An interview at New Court with the head of the firm—especially in his later years—had to be amazingly rapid. You were taken into a room and told to wait. In a few moments Lord Rothschild came in, sometimes smoking a cigar, placed a watch on his desk, and intimated that the audience would last five minutes, or three, or even less. In that space of time he absorbed in his right ear—in the other he was deaf—an extraordinary grasp of what was said to him, made one or two shrewd comments, and then dismissed you to stalk off to some other room to listen to another proposal in the same manner. In this way he got through an extraordinary amount of work.

One of his greatest assets in business was his memory, for which he had a reputation even in his early days. "When I want to know an historical fact I always ask Natty," said Disraeli once, at a

dinner-party in Piccadilly: and praise from him in such a matter was indeed praise. Later in life, what with this and with personal recollections extending over half a century, he became a veritable store-house of information of men and affairs of his time, of the men behind the affairs and the affairs behind the men. Personal recollections were reinforced by his reading. For his taste in literature was curiously restricted. In belles-lettres, his chief admiration, like Disraeli's, was for (of all persons) Lord Byron, especially his *Hebrew Melodies*. But, even more than this, he read and re-read the speeches of Disraeli, his admiration for whom grew more and more after he definitely joined the Unionist Party: and he could (and did) quote whole pages by heart. Other than this, his favourite books were historical and biographical, from which his personal recollections were enriched.

But, for all his warm heart, wide sympathy and transparent honesty, his manner was a little unfortunate. Those who came into contact with him in his public work strongly resented his dictatorial attitude. He was a Rothschild, and he knew it, men said. Even as a young man, his method of address was far from propitiating, and he seemed to progress in conversation crab-wise, by contradicting every statement which was made to him—a curious method of stimulating table-talk. Members of the Jewish community complained that, though his strong sense of duty drove him to immerse himself in communal work, he kept them pointedly excluded from his social life. A lady guest at Tring (it was Lady Fingall) who dared to take one of his famous musk-roses unasked was upbraided for it before the entire dinner-table, even though he subsequently made honourable amends by having



an enormous bouquet of them put in her carriage before she left. He attained with years an increasing reputation for *brusquerie* in talk, though for this his growing deafness was in large measure responsible. Yet long before this unkind critics used to say that Lord Rothschild, Lord Randolph Churchill and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach were the three rudest men in England.

But there was another side to his nature: and those who spoke of his austerity and grim devotion to duty would have relented had they seen him with children—especially with grandchildren, *a fortiori* his own. In this at least he did not recognize social distinctions. The lodge-keepers' offspring at Tring Park (where he played the country squire in the middle of an enormous estate) could not quite understand why, on his birthday, he always gave them a present: it seemed to them an inversion of the natural order of things. And adults who passed from acquaintance to friendship—to take, for example, men so different from himself as Alfred Lyttelton and Lord Haldane—were drawn to him as much by the warmth and generosity of his nature as by his personal ability and his wide knowledge. An acquaintance who realized his somewhat unfortunate manner recorded that he had one of the largest hearts—with the thinnest crust of bad manners—in London.

"You must be a happy man in such a home as this," Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, that inveterate reminiscencer, once said to Nathan Mayer Rothschild. "Happy! I, happy!" was the guttural reply. "What, happy when, just as you are going to dine a letter is placed in your hand saying: 'If you do not send £500 I will blow your brains out.' Happy! I, happy!" This sort of fear regularly

haunted the rich men of the city, whose illimitable means were regarded as a personal affront by all whose financial position was less stable. Such cases were often hushed up: but occasionally they received police-court notoriety. In 1862, just after Nathaniel entered the firm at New Court, a certain "Charles Reynolds" (his real name was Davis) was charged with threatening to assassinate Baron Lionel and his two brothers if they would not loan him what was (considering the virulence of his menaces) the extremely moderate sum of £500. He was convicted, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment: but it was understood that, but for the express request of the Prosecutor, the term would have been for life, in accordance with the ruthless criminal code in force at that time. Again, in 1913, an attempt to blackmail the firm by a German (this foreign competition in the home market was doubly unwelcome to a Protectionist) was brought to Court.

Of other attempts of the same sort, the public knew little: but they had their effect especially on the head of the firm, who as years passed became more and more nervous. On the Day of Atonement, when he paid his regular religious pilgrimage to the East End, he was always accompanied now by a couple of private detectives; and after the attack on his brother Leopold in 1912 he gave up the practice entirely. But even his office had its terrors. The report that a bomb was likely to be sent to him, as had happened once with his Uncle James in Paris, and more recently with an American millionaire, made him deeply nervous: the precautions at New Court were increased: and during the last years of his life he undoubtedly lived in some physical fear. It was a species of hypo-

chondria similar to that which filled his brother Alfred's life with dread, though given a more rational turn.

If the Rothschilds were synonymous in the public mind (not now with quite so much justification as had once been the case) for making money, they were no less associated with giving it. A special department existed at New Court for charitable purposes—not presumably run at a profit, however high the percentage of its spiritual returns. Devotion to Jewish causes did not diminish liberality to non-Jewish ones. And obligations were not fulfilled by the mere writing of a cheque, but extended to personal service. Lord Rothschild was for example Chairman of three London Hospitals and Treasurer of a fourth, as well as—by His Majesty's special request—of King Edward VII's Hospital Fund. In addition he was Chairman of the Council of the British Red Cross—an office which even before 1914 was no sinecure, and in the last year of his life was almost a full-time job. (He had been working for this cause, incidentally, ever since the war of 1870.)

In addition to these conventional and in a way automatic functions, there were occasional experiments, of a more constructive nature, in fresh directions. He was very largely responsible for the establishment of the Association of the Subscribers to Charities, which subsequently developed into the more modernly conceived London Council of Social Welfare. Another direction in which his philanthropy was extended was in the provision of improved housing for the poor—an object in which his family in all its branches were quick to see the key to many social problems. When he first took up public work he served as a member of the

Sanitary Committee of the Jewish Board of Guardians, and the experience he gained in connexion with the work of that body impelled him to take steps for the erection of better housing accommodation for the working classes in the East End as a whole. In May 1885, the Four per cent Industrial Dwellings Company was formed, with Rothschild as Chairman. This undertaking, a sensible combination of business and philanthropy, erected within the next couple of decades dwellings for some 7,000 persons, who were enabled to obtain small flats, hygienically constructed, at low rentals. The success of the enterprise is shown by the fact that the number of empty flats was always very small and fresh extensions were continually made without any further call on capital.

But even in his generosity he was gruff and uncordial. He had a streak of superstition in his nature. "Never have anything to say to unlucky people," he advised his friends. "You may do them no good, and they may do you harm." He neither expected nor welcomed thanks from anyone who profited from his benefactions: and, whether out of cynicism or from bitter experience, he professed not to believe in gratitude. "If one does anybody a good turn," he declared, a little wistfully "it is generally a question of getting somewhere out of shelter from their abuse." One seems to see in this an echo of his great-grandfather's curious theory, that the acceptance of thanks for an act of charity closed the transaction, whereas otherwise the Almighty was in duty bound to see that the action received its reward. Hence he would always thrust a coin in a beggar's hand and hasten away before the latter had time to voice his gratitude.

As the typical Rich Man of the City, public-

spirited as well as wealthy, Lord Rothschild took a leading part in an astonishingly large number of new schemes of every description, some of them perhaps not quite so innocuous as others. Thus, he was a fanatical opponent of the movement for women's suffrage, which horrified all of his Victorian instincts. It was a matter in which one who remembered the long struggle for Jewish emancipation might have been better advised to suppress his feelings. Nevertheless he principally financed that rather humorous body, the Anti-Suffrage Society, with its tell-tale colours of black and blue. It was perhaps fortunate for him that he did not survive to see the triumph of a cause to which he so deeply objected.

## CHAPTER VII

### MR. ALFRED

As you walk along Park Lane from Hyde Park Corner, it is not probable that you will be very much struck (once the plaster has weathered a little more) by the newness of one of the turnings on the right-hand side, opposite the Park. Up to 1938, however, it did not exist. Curzon Street formerly ended in a *mésalliance* with a delightful backwater, with luxurious houses looking from their principal (though rear) windows towards the Serpentine over the trees and the greensward, the decapitated relic of which is still known as Seamore Place. In order to relieve the traffic problem in Mayfair, Curzon Street was protracted not long since into Park Lane. To establish the connexion, it was found necessary to demolish Number One, Seamore Place. It was a pity. For that house was for nearly half a century one of the most famous in London. It housed one of the most remarkable collections, and entertained some of the most famous men, of the time. And its owner was Alfred Charles de Rothschild.

Baron Lionel de Rothschild's second son was of a very different type from his brothers, physically and temperamentally. Blond, debonair and exquisite, he was for years the arbiter of elegance at New Court and elsewhere. His complexion was as light as Natty's and Leo's was dark, his hair was tawny, and in his early days he wore a drooping

moustache, accompanied by side-whiskers, in the prevailing Dundreary fashion. Later, the latter were trimmed away by his faithful barber, Charles, into neat "favoris" more in accordance with the fashions of the Edwardian era, when he began to look like a *grand seigneur* left over from the Third Empire.

But this was long after he took up his occupation of the home which has just fallen victim to the rage for improvement. He purchased this in the eighteen-seventies from Christopher (Kit) Sykes, one of the Prince of Wales's most intimate friends, to whom Lord Rosebery applied Charles II's characterization of Godolphin, that he was never in the way and never out of the way. "I think it is the most charming house in London," Lord Beaconsfield wrote, not long after his younger friend had entered into occupation, "the magnificence of its decorations and furniture equalled by their good taste."

For Alfred had inherited the family intimacy with the elderly statesman, who had been entertained by his grandmother, was a bosom friend of his father, and was a frequent guest in the house of his brother. It is a little strange that the impecunious veteran, who at various states of his life was constantly receiving support from one quarter or another, was never apparently indebted to the Rothschilds for anything more than hospitality. After the fall of his second Ministry in 1880, however, hospitality became more important to him than could have been anticipated in normal circumstances. When he moved into 10 Downing Street in 1874, setting the example for the regular occupation of that awkward abode by the Prime Minister of England, he had given up his house



ALFRED DE ROTHSCHILD





in Whitehall Gardens—the successor to the one in Grosvenor Gate where he had spent those happy years with his Mary Anne; and now, with the loss of his official residence, he was (so far as London was concerned) homeless.

It was in the most tactful manner that Alfred de Rothschild now came to his rescue. He neither invited the other to live with him, which would have caused difficulties for both, nor did he vacate the house in his favour, which would have proved more than embarrassing. Instead, he placed at his disposal a suite of independent rooms at Seamore Place. The décor, if a trifle florid for some tastes, accorded admirably with his guest's quasi-Oriental standards. But there was an even greater attraction, as he informed the flame of his declining years, Lady Bradford: everything imaginable was at his disposal, but as far as Alfred was concerned, "the best and kindest host in the world," he was left entirely alone.

Here—in the house of one who was nominally a political opponent—Beaconsfield lived whenever he was in Town during the greater part of 1880, and again when he came up from Hughenden to be in his seat at the opening of Parliament at the beginning of the following year. In January, he moved into the house at 19 Curzon Street which he had taken with the money received for *Endymion*—the third of the homes of the last phase of his life to receive or be menaced with the death sentence in the year of coup-de-grâce 1938. He was indeed glad to get away. It was not that he had outstayed his welcome; but his host's brother Leopold had just become engaged (as we shall see), and the echoes of the festivities could not fail to penetrate to Seamore Place, rendering even the

most considerate of hospitality irksome to an elderly gentleman who had ceased to appreciate late hours. There was a great banquet there one Saturday night, and he could hardly refuse to attend: he was amply rewarded, though, by sitting next to Lady Dudley, who was one of his favourites, and by seeing the garden illuminated (unheard-of luxury!) by electric light. Later in the same week, there was to have been a ball, which the Prince of Wales was to have graced with his presence. Beaconsfield thought himself well out of it—he hoped to be in his first sleep before the first guest arrived. But he was at Seamore Place for dinner again in February, where once again “Prince Hal” was present, as well as Sir Charles Dilke, no longer quite so Republican as in his younger days. A box of their host’s marvellous cigars was handed round the table. He waved it aside—an occasional cigarette was as much as he could dare to permit himself now. “You English once had a great man,” he said. “He discovered tobacco, on which you English now live, and potatoes, on which your Irish live—and you cut off his head!”

Alfred’s hospitality was returned at Curzon Street on March 10th—the only big dinner-party that Beaconsfield was able to give at his new house, when his former host was the only commoner recorded to be among the guests. But he was there at least once more—late at night, on Thursday, April 21st, when his brougham drove up to the darkened house and he went in to bid his distinguished friend the last farewell and to accompany the body on the first stage of the journey to Hughenden, where his elder brother had already gone to receive it.

Those who have a penchant for historical

mysteries might perhaps find this last detail significant. Disraeli had been baptized at St. Andrew's, Holborn, in 1817, at the age of twelve. Previous to that, he had a Jewish upbringing: and, with a name like his, he could hardly have been allowed to forget his Jewish descent. But it was intensely creditable to him (Gladstone pointed it out in a moving fashion in his final tribute in the House of Commons) that, in an age when religious intolerance was still rife, he never for one moment tried to conceal or to overlook it. The reverse, indeed; and, in his books and in his speeches, even when it might have been expected to do him the most harm, he never wearied of reverting to the fact.

No longer being a Jew by faith, he found consolation in thinking of the Jews as a race, to which he could still belong even though he was baptized. (It was a similar desire to include in their tirades prosperous or prominent ex-Jews who had abandoned their former religion which led German anti-Semites subsequently to a similar somewhat muddled conclusion.) This was clearly one reason for his intimacy with the Rothschild family in two generations. But it has been suspected by some persons that at heart he retained a loyalty to the faith of his fathers, too. Shortly before his death, it is said, his lips framed a few words, which had no meaning to any of those present. They imagined that he was by now too weak to articulate properly. Some biographers, on the other hand, have suggested that they constituted the Jewish confession of faith— "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One God*"—which every Jew pronounces on his death-bed, and that the dying statesman thus returned in his last moments to the faith in which he had been brought up in childhood.

It is not impossible: but, if it were so, the movements of the two elder Rothschild brothers after his death seem to acquire some significance. They would not indeed in the case of an ordinary man. But to the very end, Disraeli was incurably romantic. He prided himself on his descent (a shade exaggerated) from the Marranos, or crypto-Jews of Spain and Portugal: and, had he in fact retained at heart his allegiance to Judaism, he would have modelled his life on theirs. In those days, a secret Jew, whose life had been one long dissimulation, would have desired that, at the very end, a Jew should be present and Jewish rites should be performed. Had Disraeli tried to imitate this, nothing would have been more natural for him than to have approached the two Jews with whom he was most familiar and to beg them, under seal of secrecy, to be present at the last rites and to give them some Jewish flavour. It was hardly a task to appeal to the mind of members of the circle of the future Edward VII. Nevertheless, had they been asked, they could hardly have refused to comply. It must be repeated that the suggestion, rationally considered, is fantastic: but, with a person of Disraeli's temperament, it is plausible. However, had this been the case, and had the Rothschild brothers complied, they would most certainly have kept the episode to themselves. Hence, whether there is any truth in the conjecture or no, the secret went to the grave, with Alfred de Rothschild, a generation ago.

It was perhaps because of his dissimilarity from the family type and his particularly Anglo-Saxon appearance that Alfred became, as it were, the liaison officer of the Rothschilds in their relations with the outside world. He was only fifteen when

he made his first public appearance, at the sumptuous wedding of his sister Leonora to her cousin Alphonse at Gunnersbury in 1857, when the newspapers gravely reported that "Baron Alfred de Rothschild" responded on behalf of the sixteen bridesmaids "in an amusing speech." (This was in reply to one of the expected witty effusions from Bernal Osborne, who spoke from an isolated table in the middle of the room, to which he had been banished, he said, by the amplitude of the ladies' gowns.) At the General Election of 1874, by now a little more mature, he represented his father at a meeting of the Electors of the City at the London Tavern, when he offered himself for the last time as a candidate for Parliament, with disastrous results.

At New Court, too, "Mr. Alfred" (as he was invariably called) was mainly concerned with external relationships. It was widely imagined that a person so absorbed in life's amenities could not be a very capable business man, and that he was no more than an ornamental adjunct of the firm: but in the City he was known to be a singularly alert and clear-headed financier, for all his debonair manner. He generally made his appearance at the office very late; but, conscientious to a degree, he stayed late also in compensation—much to the subsequent disgust of some of the junior members of the firm and family, who were not allowed similar antemeridian latitude, but whom he would not allow to go away in the evening until he himself had left.

Alfred de Rothschild enjoys the distinction of having been the only Jewish director that the Bank of England has ever had to the present day—an interesting point, for those who identify the Jews

exclusively with High Finance. It has been stated repeatedly that in the eighteenth century a certain Anthony da Costa, and later on the famous Sampson Gideon, held the same appointment. The records of the institution on the other hand (and they should surely be believed) provide no shadow of confirmation; and it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century was well advanced that a Jewish name at last appears, with Alfred Charles de Rothschild.

The directors of the Bank of England cannot be themselves bankers by calling; for their private interests might (according to the old idea) be in competition with those of the great national institution. The House of Rothschild are not, however, bankers in the technical sense, since they do not accept money on deposit and pay it out on the customer's demand. Hence this disqualification did not apply. Their financial interests and importance made it desirable nevertheless for them to collaborate as closely as possible with Threadneedle Street. Yet it is against the usual practice for the head of any firm to be elected to the Board of Directors of the Bank, since that office may demand the whole of a man's time and energies. For that reason, when in 1868 it was desired to add a member of the House of Rothschild to the board, the choice fell neither on Baron Lionel, the head of the firm, nor on his eldest son Nathaniel who was taking an increasing share in the direction, but on the second son Alfred, who, though still in the middle twenties, had already begun to represent the House in its external relations. For the next twenty years, he continued to be re-elected time after time—a sufficient testimony that, whatever the outside world might think, he

inherited his share of the family's financial perspicacity.

The connexion was broken, in 1889, in somewhat ludicrous circumstances. The vocations of banker and collector do not always harmonize. The day came (thus at least City gossip asserted) when the Director could not restrain his curiosity to know how much a certain picture dealer, who banked at Threadneedle Street, had really paid for a particularly expensive French painting recently added to the collection at Seamore Place, and found that the profits had been out of all proportion to convention or decency. Unfortunately, he was unable to keep this interesting piece of information to himself (who could?), and the uproar which resulted led to the restriction of his banking activities henceforth to the family office.

In many ways, Alfred was the most magnificent of the three Rothschild magnificos. Unmarried, his personal commitments were smaller; he was not particularly interested in country life; and his aloofness from those below his own social rank (which made him less open to approach for charitable purposes, even though his routine donations were on a profuse scale) saved his income from some of those perpetual inroads to which his brothers' were liable. He was hence able to live in a style even more luxurious than the Rothschilds generally. There was something pathetic in his endeavours to rid himself of a proportion of his vast income. The only outlet which he could find was in a gross, and to some persons offensive, exuberance. Like the rest of his family, he was open-handed to a degree. Lady Dorothy Neville spoke of his "lavish generosity and kindness of heart." Another friend said that he "made you



feel that he was grateful for being allowed to assist." But the spirit of scientific charity was alien to his nature: and a philanthropist who visited New Court and succeeded in interesting the three brothers in the cause which he was advocating was not unlikely to find "Mr. Alfred" running after him as he left with his cheque and pressing a banknote of unnecessarily high denomination in his hand, for some individual case which had attracted his personal sympathy. When the short-lived *Evening Times* was in difficulties, a cheque for £1,000 was received from him to assist the management to carry on a little longer. It was not that he had the slightest interest in the paper, but that he could not bear the idea of knowing that the staff had been thrown out penniless into the street through its collapse.

In general, however, his generosity had nothing whatsoever to do with the worthiness of the cause, and was more frequently lavished on a peer than on a pauper. And as often as not his lavishness was directed into the most unnecessary channels. He indulged in some astonishing luxuries. Many stories were current about the incredible magnificence of his manner of life. When he went down to Folkestone for a few days' change of air, accompanied by his gigantic valet, it would be in a special train, or at the very least in a special saloon; and, though the tea dispensed at his house was uniformly bad, it was served out of Sèvres china, and with gold tea-spoons. He was prodigal with his guinea cigars, even to casual acquaintances; though those who were not used to such bliss would break them in two halves and spread the luxury over successive Sundays. To express appreciation of them was as likely as not to result in the gift of the entire box, proffered with such charming

insistence that refusal would have seemed almost an insult. His array of Clubs testified almost as much to his means as to his range of interest: The Turf, Marlborough, St. James's, Bachelors, Boodles and Pratts.

As his corner of the Rothschild country, Alfred chose Halton—formerly an estate of the Dashwood family, from whom it had been purchased by Baron Lionel some time previous, towards the close of his life. The village was a typical Buckinghamshire hamlet, and the beechwoods on the estate were among the most glorious in the county. In this incongruous setting Alfred constructed his absurdly luxurious country house, built on the lines of a modern French château, but commanding glorious views over the Vale of Aylesbury. It was far from the ideal of the English country residence. The owner's taste, on a small scale, was exquisite. There was no better judge in England of a French painting or an article of bijouterie: but he was overwhelmed when it came to thinking in terms of a mansion. All that he could do was to approve the general design and to insist that no consideration of expense should be allowed to stand in the way: and it did not.

The result was not far short of appalling—though not quite so bad as some contemporaries alleged. Algernon West described Halton House as “an exaggerated nightmare of gorgeousness and senseless and ill-applied magnificence.” Eustace Balfour, who walked over from Lady de Rothschild's comfortable old mansion at Aston Clinton to visit it just as it was being completed, was even more scathing. “I have seldom seen anything more terribly vulgar,” he wrote. “Outside it is a combination of a French château and a gambling

house. Inside it is badly planned and gaudily decorated. . . . Oh, but the hideousness of everything, the showiness! the sense of lavish wealth thrust up your nose! the coarse mouldings, the heavy gilding always in the wrong place, the colours of the silk hangings! Eye hath not seen nor pen can write the ghastly coarseness of the sight."

Fortunately, all persons were not quite so discriminating, especially in the set in which Alfred moved: and the rococo decoration and heavy luxury did not constitute a bad setting for the eighteenth-century French pictures which hung on the walls, and the superb ceramics scattered lavishly about the rooms (a single mantel-shelf, it was said, held jars worth upwards of £50,000). Even West admitted that Halton House, lighted up and full of well-dressed people, appeared quite tolerable. And the host's own bedroom, small and simple, seemed to indicate that it was not so much his own taste, as that of his advisers, that was at fault. This, indeed, was in every sense of the word the most revealing part of the entire house, except for the library, with its extremely sparse shelf accommodation proclaiming the fact that the owner of the house was more interested in men than in books.

In the autumn of 1884, there was a great house-warming party. The Prince of Wales himself (who liked that sort of thing) honoured the gathering with his presence; many of the most beautiful women of the year were assembled to grace the background for the royal guest: and a celebrated conjurer was brought over specially from Paris to give an entertainment. It marked the acme of the acceptance of the Rothschilds into Society; higher than this no man could go.

Unlike the majority of his family, however,

Alfred was essentially a townsman. He was uninterested in sport. Stock-breeding seemed to him rather a coarse joke. His country house was maintained largely as a concession to fashion, which afforded him the opportunity for entertaining even more lavishly than in Seamore Place. He was interested more in the inside of it than in the surroundings. The approach and the grounds were clumsily laid out. The village beyond was an unknown entity; and, though no landlord could have been more kindly, he had little real understanding of his tenants. It was highly patriotic of him to give his glorious beechwoods unreservedly to the Government during the war of 1914-18, but it is questionable whether he really regretted them. He resembled in many ways that exquisite sister of his, Baroness Alphonse de Rothschild, of Paris, who (it is said) once asked a friend who employed a smaller battalion of gardeners than she did, how he managed to get dead leaves in his park.

On the other hand, Alfred's consideration for those in his employ was something unique. His memory is still a fragrant one among the older generation in the neighbourhood, who remember the beer and bread-and-cheese which were always ready for them in the kitchen, and the new shillings and half-crowns given their children on all possible pretexts. There was no other estate in England where in the middle of each morning a cart went round with hot coffee and bread-and-butter for all the workmen and gardeners, without exception. And guests had to wait for their dinner until what they considered the extremely inconvenient hour of nine o'clock so that the staff (whose quarters were the most comfortable part of the house) could finish their own evening meal,

to which they sat down at seven or eight, in comfort.<sup>1</sup>

Hospitalities at Halton were on the most profuse scale, though a marked preference might be discerned for a peer over a commoner, and for a diplomat (like the Marquis de Soveral, Portuguese Minister in London and Alfred's bosom friend for many years, or Baron von Eckardstein of the German Embassy) over either. As the visitors (he could sleep twenty-five of them, though if he did so he would have found his dining-room accommodation inadequate) left Tring station to drive up to the house, they would notice lamps flashing at intervals along the road. They marked the place of pointsmen, posted at positions of vantage, who signalled up to the staff the progress of the party, so that the host might be in readiness, not a moment too soon or too late, to greet them. The guests would be entertained superbly, without regard to expense, though they were sometimes hard put to it to realize that they were in the country. (The only inconvenience was that at night they would be aroused by the heavy tread of the watchmen who circumambulated the corridors to guard the host's fabulous treasures, in case the heavy shutters and massive bolts and ingenious electric burglar-alarms proved inadequate.) When they went to dress for dinner, they would find the most exquisite sprays of flowers in front of the mirror, to wear in corsage or button-hole. And, when they left, they did not go away empty-handed. Giant boxes of hot-house blooms and great baskets of luxurious fruits, cakes and chocolates were packed into every car-

<sup>1</sup> The staff had to put up with one typically Victorian inconvenience, however. The windows of their sleeping-quarters all faced inwards, so that no guest might be subjected to the indignity of being followed by plebeian eyes as he took the air in the grounds!

riage before it drove off. True, all this prodigality could have been lavished to far better result on hospitals than on Duchesses. But, unlike his brothers, Alfred came very little into touch with hospitals, and a good deal into touch with Duchesses: so that his generosity, not inferior to theirs, was diverted into less useful channels.

From his earliest years, he had been interested in the theatre. As an infant, he had acted the sprite in a fairy-tale written by Bernal Osborne, the old family friend; and later on, at a house-party in the country, he appeared in a play called *Perfection*—a title amended after the performance by the neighbours, a little obviously, into *Imperfection*. In his undergraduate days, he was director of the Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Company, and once appeared as Fra Diavolo in a burlesque, to Lord Carrington's *Zerlinda*. (The best tribute to his abilities at this time was that of Frank Burnand, who questioned whether any better name could have been mentioned as a guarantee for the "sterling quality of the notes"! ) These tastes clung to him. Year after year, his frail elegance was never missing at any London first-night. Disraeli always sought his advice on matters of entertainment: and towards the end of his life, when he went to the theatre, Alfred de Rothschild and Sir Henry Calcroft, later to be killed by brigands in Greece, were always opposite him in the box (it was not difficult to imagine who was the host).

As a consequence of this stage interest, he began to have stage interests. George Edwardes persuaded him to provide money to take over the Gaiety Theatre. For years, when it was at the height of its fame, he practically ran it through Hector Tenent, who usually arranged his theatrical

parties in Seamore Place. On one occasion, too, in 1890, when Lily Langtry was in difficulties about a new production at the Prince's Theatre, she applied to him for £300. The money was of course forthcoming. But the somewhat hysterical tone of her application, and the dramatic manner in which she referred to the critical condition of affairs, occasioned great amusement at New Court. It happened to be the week of the Baring Crisis, when the City had to think about things more important and more serious than the prospects of a new play and more momentous issues were trembling in the balance.

Music was another passion: he himself was a good pianist, and sometimes attempted to perform on other instruments. During the Opera season, he was to be seen nightly in his stage box at Covent Garden, and he would always give several "professional" dinners to the operatic stars, followed by a reception to which the best-known names in the musical world would be invited. Sometimes, the entertainments at Halton too would be graced by the presence of operatic and musical stars of the first magnitude. Mischa Elman—one of Alfred's discoveries—might be in the house-party, and after dinner make his host's exquisite orchestra sound amateurish when he took out his violin. Melba herself (who entrusted the management of her financial affairs to his hands) sometimes appeared there. The host used to plume himself on the alacrity with which prima donnas accepted his invitation to sing to his assembled guests, and pointed out with pride that they did it gratis. He did not realize that the little present he gave them at the end was worth twice as much as the maximum fee they might have ventured to expect elsewhere.



" Alfred "

ALFRED DE ROTHSCHILD

*Caricature by " Spy " (Sir Leslie Ward)*





During the Boer War, it was Alfred de Rothschild who arranged the famous Gala Night at Covent Garden on behalf of war charities—and only he could have arranged it. For no one else would Patti have broken her invariable rule about appearing at a charitable performance and come to sing with Alvarez—brought over specially from New York—in the great scene from Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*. There were few other persons who, even for such a cause as this, could have obtained the services of the massed bands of the Household Cavalry and the Brigade of Guards: yet these were only items on the programme. It was a great success. The Prince and Princess of Wales graced the Royal box. The prices asked were colossal—£250 for a box, and £15 for a stall—and the total proceeds amounted to £11,000.

But, even in his musical and dramatic diversions, Alfred was sometimes guilty of appalling breaches of good taste, simply because they were expensive. Thus he could not refrain from entertaining his guests, in the eighteen-eighties, with a newly-invented instrument called an Orchestrion, which one of them described as “a combination of a barrel-organ, a harmonium, a penny trumpet, and a Jew's harp, with poker and tongs knocked down at intervals.” He maintained at Halton his own private orchestra, which always played after dinner and which he often conducted himself. This, if luxurious to a degree, was not unconventional. But the same could not be said of the private circus which he subsequently added to the attractions; and the aristocratic house-parties would be slightly amused at the sight of their nonchalant host dressed in a beautiful blue frock-coat and lavender kid-gloves, and armed with a whip which

he used to crack benignly, acting as ring-master. Sometimes, in addition, professional conjurers or billiard-tricksters might be imported from the Continent to amuse the company. It was the orchestra (not the circus) which he sent on one occasion at the request of his cousin, Lady Battersea, to perform at the Convict Prison at Aylesbury. It was vaguely reminiscent of the humanitarian gesture of the Reform Club, which during the Potato Famine is said to have offered the services of its famous French chef to alleviate the sufferings of the Irish peasantry who (they understood) were in difficulties about their food.

Alfred de Rothschild's parties, in town as well as in the country, were famous. It was not only the magnificence of the house, the frescoed ceilings, the perfection of the cuisine, the priceless paintings which adorned the walls, and the carriages in waiting in Seamore Place during the summer months, so that any guest who desired might drive round the Park in the silvery light of the moon. The musical entertainment which followed afterwards was of a quality which the concert-hall seldom rivalled. Rubinstein, Liszt, Melba, de Reszke, Elman, were only a few of the idols of the public who might be heard sometimes in his music room: and it was the ambition of every instrumentalist and musician in London, or in Europe, to be invited to perform at "Mr. Alfred's", in the presence of some of the most famous statesmen and some of the most beautiful women in the land. Often the guests included the Heir Apparent to the throne, who was there once at a luncheon party when Patti and Niccolini both sang, and the loveliness assembled to meet him rivalled that of the Gainsboroughs on the walls. There was one

famous dinner to meet the staff of *Punch*—to which Alfred himself occasionally contributed insubstantial trifles—which was graced with the presence of a member of the Cabinet, of London's most eminent physician, and of Lord Randolph Churchill, and which, to everybody's annoyance, was generally reported to have been given by Lord Rothschild, the financier, instead of his brother the dilettante.

More characteristic than the formal receptions were the little luncheon- and dinner-parties, to which three or four men would be invited, with a single woman—often, Lily Langtry or someone of nearly equal beauty and reputation. After the meal, there was an invariable ritual which had to be performed in private. With an air of great mystery, the host would take his lady guest on one side, and ask her: "What shall I give you, beautiful lady?" He would then present her triumphantly with a bibelot of no great value, carefully prepared beforehand. The Jersey Lily once tried to get away with a diamond-studded Louis Seize snuff-box which was lying on the table: but, not unnaturally, he preferred the comparatively unimportant object of his own choice.

Having departed from the tradition of his house by remaining celibate, the sedulous attention which might have been dispersed over a family became concentrated as the years progressed on himself alone. His constant anxiety for his own health developed to the verge of hypochondria. He was at the mercy of an army of doctors, secretaries and dependents who prevented him from seeing things in their true proportions. The range of bottles in his medicine cabinet nearly rivalled that in his cellar, and was even more in evidence. He had his

personal physician (and, later on, nurse) in constant attendance in the country, and a West End practitioner called every day in town to make a report on his health. When he yielded to the dictates of fashion and organized a shoot, he was in an agony of apprehension in case some accident should occur. All rabbit-holes had to be stopped by the keepers before the party set out, and his doctor followed behind in a dog-cart in case his services should be needed. So, too, when he had a business appointment to keep in the City, where distances were by no means long, his medical attendant advised him to walk, for the sake of his health: but his private conveyance was always at his heels, for use in case he felt faint or tired. It was a long time before he yielded to the blandishments of the newly-discovered automobile, in the use of which his brother Leo was a pioneer: and even when he did he always had his brougham following a short distance behind, for fear the mechanical contraption might break down. So, at least, men said: for even in his lifetime there gathered round him an entire saga of hypochondriac anecdote.

In addition to all this—the fop, the host, the dilettante, the millionaire of incredible lavishness—there was an intensely serious side to Alfred de Rothschild's nature. Besides his society and stage and operatic friends, he had another circle, of a very different sort: statesmen and politicians and men of action. The most incongruous of his friends (or so it seemed at least to those who did not know of the other's deep passion for beautiful things) was Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, with whom he was on terms of the deepest intimacy from his first Egyptian years onwards. It was for

him, in fact, that he had his greatest treasure, Reynolds' *Lady Bampfylde*, copied so exquisitely that it was difficult to tell the replica from the original (another copy went to Lord Poltimore). At one period, too, he used to go to 10 Downing Street every morning to see Asquith, another close friend, who set great store on his advice.

In *Who's Who* he described himself, not without a nonchalant pride, as Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Consul-General. The position entailed a certain dignity and not much work (that devolved on others whose title was not quite so high-sounding), and flattered his *amour propre*. It was in fact a quasi-hereditary office, to which he had succeeded in virtue not of being Alfred, but of being a Rothschild. His grandfather, Nathan Mayer, had intrigued for the distinction in the first instance, as it gave him something of a position in London and indicated that he had the support of the Austrian Government. His father, Baron Lionel, had worked hard to retain it on his father's death, and for precisely the same reasons; but later on, when he had risen above such unimportant considerations, discarded it in favour of his brother, Sir Anthony. (This happened—perhaps it was not a coincidence—in 1858, the year of his admission to Parliament.) Now, just as the latter's baronetcy devolved on his eldest nephew, so the Imperial and Royal Consulate General was taken over by the second, who discharged its nominal duties with aristocratic distinction until one day in 1914, when he devoutly wished that he had never heard of the office.

It was once said by malicious gossip that the head of the Vienna branch of his family, received in audience by the Emperor, informed him gravely

that the House of Austria could always count on the support of the House of Rothschild. In somewhat the same manner Alfred too felt that, by virtue of his name and position, he had his part to play in the affairs of Europe. He was not interested particularly in internal politics—he left that to Natty: but it seemed to him that Foreign Affairs were his special province, and that through his means the House of Rothschild could perform a distinct function in smoothing away international difficulties. He thought very highly of his own diplomatic abilities, and over a period of some twenty years exerted himself consistently in this direction. By reason of his social intimacies with the very highest circles in England and abroad, and his personal as well as business relations with the accredited representatives of more than one country, his voice was listened to with deference. It was only on the publication of various confidential diplomatic documents in the period after the war of 1914–18, and the appearance of the discretions and indiscretions of a host of statesmen and diplomats of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, that a wider public realized how strongly his influence had been felt in the Chanceries of Central Europe during the quarter-century that preceded the great cataclysm.

He had indeed indubitable qualifications for this, not only in his social connexions, his linguistic attainments and his close touch with the trend of events both in England and abroad, but also in the very fact that he occupied no important official position. (His Austro-Hungarian Consulate-General counted for as little in serious matters as the Knighthood of the Legion of Honour which he received from the grateful French Government.)

There was thus no question of any official sounding when he made his tentative approaches, or attempted to bring statesmen from the two sides together under his over-ornate roof. His financial interests, no less than his important family connexions on the Continent, made him dread the possibilities of war—above all, of a war between England and Germany; and he strained every nerve to bring about an Anglo-German alliance which would have removed that danger, and to smooth away the minor misunderstandings which arose from time to time.

At least as early as 1892, we find him trying to act in the capacity of mediator and thus to bring the statesmen on the opposing sides together. Six years later, his work seemed about to bear fruit. England was at the time virtually isolated in Europe. The Fashoda incident had alienated France: the dispute over Port Arthur embittered relations with Russia: and (in spite of the incredible stupidity of the Kaiser's telegram to President Kruger, congratulating him on the failure of the Jameson Raid) an Anglo-German alliance was by no means out of the question, and from certain points of view would have been highly desirable. Balfour, writing to his uncle, Lord Salisbury, in April 1898 mentions Alfred de Rothschild, together with Baron von Eckardstein, Secretary to the German Embassy and one of the latter's most intimate friends (who has been mentioned before in a similar connexion), among those who were most active behind the scenes in preparing the ground for the conversations that had just started.

At a carefully-planned dinner-party given early that spring at Seamore Place, at which several



persons who stood high in English life were present, Eckardstein continued the efforts which he had begun in the previous year to bring the leading British statesmen into more intimate contact with German diplomacy. In the friendly discussions which thus started, the principal on the one side was Count Hatzfeld, the German Ambassador; on the other Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies and the leading spirit in the Salisbury administration, who was acting on behalf of the Prime Minister. Neutral, and uncompromising, territory for the meeting was desirable; and "Alfred de Rothschild accordingly abandoned his dining-room to us and provided a sumptuous déjeuner." Subsequently, he succeeded in bringing the two protagonists together again under his hospitable roof at Halton, where various outstanding questions were further discussed.

The negotiations were, however, without result—and for a peculiarly absurd reason. The initiative, as we have seen, came from Eckardstein on the one side and Alfred de Rothschild on the other. But the German Ambassador was never fully aware of the part played by his junior, and imagined that England was responsible for the advances, which (as he imagined) were being made exclusively on her side. As a result, the Wilhelmstrasse made the fatal error of thinking that Britain was in a position which left her no alternative but to appeal to German friendship, and was not disposed to be reasonable.

The result of this was seen a little later on, when relations between the two powers became seriously strained over the question of Samoa. Both sides took up so intransigent a stand that Hatzfeld was

positively nervous at transmitting the instructions he had received, for fear lest they might lead to a diplomatic breach. He preferred to inform the British Government unofficially of the state of feeling in Berlin, and of the serious consequences that might ensue if they persisted in their unaccommodating attitude. It was Alfred de Rothschild whose name suggested itself as the most convenient avenue of approach, and largely through the latter's tact the difficulties were smoothed over. Again, when at the beginning of 1900, after the Boer War had been in progress for nearly a year, a protest followed the searching of the German steamer *Bundesrat* in Delagoa Bay, and the English Press became restive, it was Alfred de Rothschild who was asked to use his influence to calm it, which he very gladly did. "Baron [i.e., Alfred de] Rothschild," reported Count Metternich, the acting German Ambassador (making use of the hereditary Austrian title which the English branch of the family had by now dropped), "has confidentially informed me that . . . a Cabinet Minister has urged him to make every effort to bring pressure to bear on *The Times* in this matter. Baron Rothschild was shortly to meet Mr. Buckle, the Editor-in-Chief of *The Times*, and told me that he intended to speak to him very strongly about it." And it was he, too, who at the time of the Boxer Rebellion in China made every effort to secure to Germany the empty honour of the command of the international expeditionary force which was sent to suppress it.

One of Alfred de Rothschild's letters to Eckardstein, of the Boer War period, illustrates in a particularly lucid fashion his methods, his objects, and

the deference with which his overtures were treated on both sides of the North Sea:

Your friends (my dear Eckardstein) know from experience that I have had the interests of the two countries at heart for many, many years; although during this period various subjects of discussion have arisen between the two Governments, taking it on the whole, great good will has subsisted with regard to Germany in the highest circles, in the Ministries and in the country itself, and successive Ministries have always done everything possible to meet Germany's wishes; I can prove personally that this is the case, for I have always been more or less behind the scenes, and I have always done my best to produce satisfactory results. When Prince Bismarck was Chancellor he wanted to have a representative on the Egyptian *Caisse de la Dette*, and this was immediately agreed to; later he embarked upon a colonial policy which, after discussion with Lord Derby, was also approved by the British Government (on the Samoa question an agreement was reached in accordance with Germany's wishes, and quite recently, at the special request of the German Government, British troops in China were placed under the supreme command of Count Waldersee). In a word, as far as I can recollect, the British Government has always done everything possible to meet the wishes of the German Government.

What is the position now? For some months, it might indeed be said for some years, the German Press has constantly written against England; indeed, to such an extent that authoritative circles are beginning to wonder what is the

aim of this aggressive policy, and whether Prince Bülow or the German Government cannot do something to prevent it. I am well aware that the Press in Germany is free, as it is in England, and that it will not have its policy prescribed for it, but when the Press of a country spreads rumours about a friendly Power that are absolutely false, the Government could have well taken the first convenient opportunity of stating how much it regrets that such false statements have been given currency.

This has occurred with regard to our Expeditionary Force in South Africa, and such allegations have not merely made the Germans resident in this country indignant . . . People here would have been glad to hear that the caricatures of our Royal Family, which were sold in the streets of Germany, had been confiscated by the police. In a word, of recent years Germany's policy towards England has been a kind of "pinprick" policy, and, although a pin is not a very impressive instrument, repeated pricks may cause a wound, and, since I hope and pray with my whole heart that no serious wound may result, I am venturing to address these lines to you in the hope that you will clearly explain to Count Bülow how difficult my position in this matter has become with regard to the British Government, since I have done everything possible over such a long period of years, and that I feel now that you do not fully appreciate the great advantages of a genuine understanding with England. Possibly Count Bülow does not know that various German Ambassadors have often met famous English statesmen at my house, and it is not very long since the deceased Count Hatzfeld

frequently met Mr. Chamberlain at my house, and they both shared absolutely identical views regarding the general policy of the two countries, in their mutual interests.

In referring to these details in a very private way, my dear Eckardstein, I do so in order to show that I am not speaking *sans connaissance de cause*, and I should be infinitely sorry if the small *refroidissement* which at present obtains, and has absolutely no *raison d'être*, should continue, and possibly even increase. . . . I regard this, however, as absolutely impossible, and it would only need a slight effort on the part of Count Bülow to blow away the cloud which is at present hovering. Possibly you can prevail upon His Excellency to send me a few lines in reply to my observations; I would naturally show these only in the highest circles, and make the most discreet use of them; I am convinced that a friendly *éclaircissement* would produce the most satisfactory result—and immediately. If you should have the opportunity, my dear Eckardstein, assure the Emperor of my complete devotion; you know how greatly I esteem His Majesty.

Yours,

ALFRED VON ROTHSCHILD.<sup>1</sup>

One could go on, almost indefinitely, did the scale of this volume permit it. For Alfred de Rothschild's exquisiteness, his aloofness and his dilettantism created a false impression in the minds of the general public in his later years. They thought of him as the brother of Lord Rothschild,

<sup>1</sup> The text is quoted in abbreviated form from Count Corti's *Reign of the House of Rothschild*, pp. 455-7, after Eckardstein's *Lebenserinnerungen*.

who spent money lavishly and who was interested in art: and that was all. But there was a great deal more to him than that. One can hardly pick up any volume dealing with English life in the half-century which preceded the outbreak of war of 1914-18 in which Alfred de Rothschild does not figure prominently, and in many roles. He was so popular indeed that his name almost became a by-word; and a much-fancied imported cigar (not quite of the quality which he used to dispense to his friends) was sold under the registered name "Alfred de Rothschild." The exquisiteness was a background for a strongly-marked and versatile personality, to which his lavish eccentricities and his profusion simply gave an added interest and colour. Of the three magnificent brothers, he indubitably played the most important part in the affairs of his time. As our knowledge of recent history grows clearer, it does not seem too much to say that, although he never occupied any public office of the least importance, he was among the outstanding as well as the most picturesque characters of the Edwardian era.

## CHAPTER VIII

LEO

ON December 3rd, 1845, Benjamin Disraeli, then in Paris, began a letter to Baron Lionel de Rothschild in the following terms:

Hôtel de l'Europe,  
Rue de Rivoli.

My dear Baron,

The journals of to-day give us the interesting information of the birth of your son. I hope he will prove worthy of his pure and sacred race, and of his beautiful brothers and sisters. We are anxious to hear that Madame Lionel is as well as we could all wish, and that you are happy. . . .

A little more than thirty-five years later, the same Disraeli, now known as Earl of Beaconsfield—old and feeble and illustrious—wrote to the man whose father he had congratulated so warmly on his birth, congratulating him, a shade indelicately, on his engagement: "I have always been of the opinion," he said, "that there cannot be too many Rothschilds."

The hero of both occasions was Leopold Lionel de Rothschild, who meanwhile had studied at King's College School and at Cambridge, where he was a member of the True Blue Club founded by Pitt in 1776; had travelled widely abroad, penetrat-

ing even as far as Russia; had joined the family business in New Court; and had become known in London society as a model of style, an owner of race-horses, and an intimate friend of the Prince of Wales. He was in his thirty-sixth year when in 1881 he married Maria Perugia, a member of an old Italian Jewish family which had reached Vienna via Trieste, and sister of the beautiful Mrs. Arthur Sassoon. The wedding was in its way even more magnificent than those luxurious affairs which had taken place at Gunnersbury or Piccadilly when his father was still alive. Alfred gave an enormous banquet at Seamore Place for the bride and bridegroom, having the garden lit for the occasion (as Dizzy was so impressed to see) by electricity. On the night following the wedding, there was to be a ball, at which the Prince of Wales was expected; the Sassoons gave a great dance subsequently. It was not surprising that the former Prime Minister found this festive atmosphere a little trying, notwithstanding all his host's tact, and hastened his departure to his new house in Curzon Street.

The wedding took place on January 19th at the Central Synagogue in Great Portland Street (the foundation stone of which had been laid by the bridegroom's father). It was a day memorable not only for this but also for the unprecedented weather. On January 13th, after one of the mildest winters on record, sudden cold had set in. At some places in the country, the temperature was below zero—over thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit below freezing-point, that is. Postal communications between London and the country were interrupted: with the thaw low-lying districts were flooded: and a hundred barges were sunk at the mouth of the Thames. Immediately before the wedding there



was a violent blizzard which made it impossible for many of the expected guests to attend. Among them was the Earl of Beaconsfield, who, however, managed to get to the reception—one of the last social functions he ever attended. The scene in the Synagogue was a most memorable one. The flowers were so luxurious that it was said that Messrs. Veitch had supplied no one else for an entire week; and the gathering was graced by the presence of the Prince of Wales himself, royally happy to participate in his friend's day of rejoicing.

It was perhaps the first time since the memorable visit of the Royal Dukes to the Great Synagogue in 1809, under the escort of Abraham Goldsmid, that a member of the royal family had been officially in a London Synagogue. His Royal Highness sat in the place of honour, between the bridegroom's two brothers, took the greatest interest in the entire ceremonial, signed the register, and afterwards insisted on being shown one of the Scrolls of the Law used for reading the synagogal lessons, and its ornamental appurtenances. Leopold's speech at the wedding breakfast was a model of brevity and tact (though not so admirable as that made on a similar occasion by a semi-namesake, who expressed the hope that he and his bride would be privileged to entertain their guests on many similar occasions in future). "I have enjoyed until now a happy life," he said. "I am sure, Sir, you will excuse my saying anything more." (The last remark was addressed to His Royal Highness.)

The honeymoon was spent at the bridegroom's house, near Leighton Buzzard, to which the couple drove through snow-drifts four feet deep: and on the following Saturday the happy husband walked over the fields to attend the confirmation ceremony



“ Racing and Sporting ”  
LEOPOLD DE ROTHSCHILD  
*Caricature by “ Spy ” (Sir Leslie Ward)*



of his eldest nephew, later the second Lord Rothschild, which was held at Tring Park.

In the records of the Marlborough House and Edwardian eras, Leopold stands out less distinctively by far than either of his brothers. He did his work conscientiously at New Court: he built up as in duty bound (for he was a Rothschild) a superb collection of silver plate: he patronized the arts and crafts lavishly: he hunted on Mondays, in season: he shot dutifully but not well: he kept a very successful stud: he was a Deputy Lieutenant for Buckinghamshire and Lieutenant of the City of London: he did a very great deal of charitable work and was Treasurer of more than one hospital: he was a pioneer of motoring in England, and was partly instrumental in getting the vexatious speed-limit removed in 1902. It was by no means a great record. He started life in fact with the initial disadvantage of being the youngest son: and, though he was the darling of the family, his elder brothers' strongly-marked personalities made it a little difficult for his own to be developed and expressed in a striking fashion.

His principal characteristic was, in fact, his boundless kindness. It was not obscured, as in the case of Nathaniel, by a dictatorial manner, nor canalized, as in the case of Alfred, by social aloofness. It was all-considerate and all-embracing. It was not only that he never turned a deaf ear to any appeal. It was far more that his manner eased the application, and that his sympathy sweetened the gift. If not the most distinguished, he was certainly the most popular, of the three brothers. Men and women of the period mention him frequently in their memoirs and recollections, seldom in an exciting or memorable context, but never with

the slightest shade of criticism or blame or obloquy or malice. On the other hand, from the sheer simplicity of his pleasures and largeness of his heart—more easy to extol than to particularize—his figure emerges less positively from the contemporary background. To characterize him as the kindest Englishman of his generation is justified by the terms of affection in which the men and women of the period record him.

In private life he was not only one of the kindest and most generous but also one of the most considerate of men. Apart from the immense sums given annually to charity by the firm of which he was a partner, he was personally a munificent contributor (though often anonymously) to every worthy cause. To no appeal did he turn a deaf ear. But his assistance was not only in the monetary sphere, and many men and women had cause to remember the encouragement and practical help he gave them at the outset of their careers. Moreover, no millionaire gave in so graceful a manner as he did, and it was difficult to decide which to admire the more, the gifts themselves or the manner of the giving of them. He had, people said, a positive greed for doing good. He did not even resent it when he was deceived. "I have sometimes been taken in," he once said, referring to his charitable work. "But I always felt that I had the best of the transaction, and I have never regretted my being mistaken."

At the same time, he was indubitably the most warmly Jewish in his sympathies of the three brothers, notwithstanding the aristocratic and sporting environment in which he passed so much of his life. In a school copy-book, when he was at school, he wrote his name proudly: "Leopold Lionel de Rothschild, a Jew." Later in life, he said

that there were two things of which he felt supremely proud—of being a Rothschild and of being a Jew. And, in his manner of life, he made it plain that this was more than a matter of form.

Even in the office, though he worked so smoothly in harness with his two brothers, his attitude contrasted very markedly with Natty's gruffness and Alfred's aloofness. It would seem during the course of an interview with him that he was simultaneously dictating one letter, writing another, and keeping his eye on the latest Stock Exchange prices as they appeared on the tape. But the visitor had the impression nevertheless that he was receiving the other's entire and undivided, as well as sympathetic, attention. He would go away with the feeling that nothing feasible would be left undone to assist in the matter about which he had come, and as likely as not bearing with him a box of those wonderful Rothschild cigars from the apparently inexhaustible cabinet, to which the youngest partner resorted even more frequently than his brothers.

As became a member of Edward VII's circle, Leo was passionately fond of cards. Puritans might consider it a vice: but in the end he was able to inform them, quite truthfully, that on one occasion the passion had saved his life. It was on March 4th, 1912. Broughams had by now given place to motor-cars: and Leopold left the office in New Court to drive down to the country. In St. Swithin's Lane, where the car had to come almost to a standstill owing to the narrowness of the street, a young man came forward and shot at him with a revolver. It was a young Jew named William Tebbitt, a manufacturer's agent, whose health had been undermined by a recent attack of influenza after studying too hard in order to pass his exam-

inations, and who nursed a grudge against anyone who would not help him as lavishly as he expected. A plain-clothes constable who grappled with the assailant was wounded. Leopold went back into New Court unscathed, and later went on to his destination by train. When he arrived, he discovered that he owed his life to a pack of cards which he had been carrying in his overcoat pocket, and which deflected the bullet.

Notwithstanding the simplicity of his character, Leopold had more addresses than either of his brothers: but there was a reason for this. In London, he lived at 5 Hamilton Place, at the rear of the famous Rothschild Row at Hyde Park Corner. Besides this he inherited his father's house at Gunnersbury, which Nathan Mayer had bought in 1835, but was fast being overwhelmed by villadom. At Wing in Bedfordshire, on the Buckinghamshire border, not far off Leighton Buzzard and in the immediate neighbourhood of his two brothers, he owned his delightful, rambling home "Ascott" with its commanding views and magnificent gardens. And his interest in racing led him to acquire Palace House at Newmarket, where Edward VII often stayed with him and other guests included some of the most prominent figures in Europe, from Arthur James Balfour downwards.

At Leighton Buzzard he played the country gentleman, entertaining freely but without the slightest ostentation, showing the keenest interest in his home-farm, stud and stag-hounds, moving freely among the tenants, entering into their joys and sorrows, and taking a most generous part in the provision of funds to satisfy every local requirement. Yet it was at Newmarket that he had his

greatest delights. For, if his eldest brother lorded it in the City, and the second was most in his element among his pictures, Leopold's happiest hours were spent with his horses.

It is said that Nathan Mayer Rothschild, founder of the London House, had one principal diversion. He would give a golden guinea to a beggar who was expecting at the most a shilling, as though in error, and watch him disregard his physical ailments for once and make off before the slip was discovered. "You should give a beggar a guinea sometimes, too," he told Buxton, who repeated the tale. "It is capital fun."

His descendants had more conventional views of sport; and the English branch religiously did as the English do. However much the Neuchatels in Disraeli's last novel may have resembled the Rothschilds in other respects, the latter never went to Ascot twice a week as they did and sat in the Royal Enclosure with their backs to the railings. The reverse, indeed; for racing became one of their passions. Foremost, in the second generation, came the youngest son, Mayer. He was by no means the genius of the family; some said even that he was lacking in intellectual capacity. He was content to play a subordinate part in the world of finance. He entered politics, as member for Hythe (as we have seen) two years after his brother Lionel at last took his seat; but, during the fifteen years he was in the House of Commons, he never once made a speech. In the Jewish community, he left the leadership to Anthony. In the middle of the century, however, he took up racing and horse-breeding on a small scale; and the interest so grew on him that it became the all-pervading passion of his life. Beginning with a few horses put to train



with John Scott, he increased his stud without regard to expense, and set up his own training quarters, first at Russley and then at Newmarket. He made no speculative purchases, but when he had set his heart on any horse never allowed any question of price to stand in his way. In this manner he systematically improved the breed. It was a proud day for him when General Peel informed the House of Commons that he had just seen in Baron Mayer's stables a dozen horses, any one of which could carry sixteen stone across any racing country in the world. Further than this, praise could not go!

By degrees, the blue jacket and yellow cap became better and better known on every race-course in England, and the owner whose interests they represented was immensely popular. "You may be able to buy Europe, but you will never sell a race," it was said of him. Political or financial honours could be left to others, and they were welcome: but, in the eyes of the ordinary Englishman, Mayer was the Baron Rothschild—nay, "the Baron" *tout court*.

In opposition to his friend Dizzy and so many others with whom he intermingled, he was firmly persuaded (as was a later wit) that there decidedly *was* a greater race in the world than the Jews—namely, the Derby, which he duly won in 1871 with his famous Favonius. In that same season he also carried off the Oaks for the second time with his mare Hannah (named after his daughter, the later Lady Rosebery, and produce of his great favourite King Tom), as well as the Thousand Guineas and the St. Leger. This remarkable sequence resulted in 1871 becoming known in racing circles as the Baron's Year. The record of

one owner carrying off both the first-named races in one season had been known only four times before in the entire chronicle of the Turf—and of the four lucky persons two were Dukes, which no doubt made a difference. Baron Mayer's total winnings, in that memorable year, came to £25,000 in stakes alone, for he was not a betting man. He was convinced that he had yet another Derby winner in Laburnum, and in addressing his constituents at Hythe gave utterance to the memorable tip (all the more memorable since it formed the climax of a political oration) "follow the Baron." But Laburnum, unfortunately, turned out an arrant rogue, and it was perhaps in shame as well as sadness that Mayer retired from politics at the next dissolution of Parliament, just before his death.

The stud was now supervised by his brother Anthony (who, in his younger days, had done something to popularize horse-racing in France), for his niece Hannah, Mayer's daughter. Her marriage with Lord Rosebery, not very long after, united the Crafton and the Durdans stables, with very notable results. It was thus left to his nephew Leopold to revive seriously the Rothschild association with the Turf—and he did so, appropriately enough, with a filly named Fashion, a daughter of his uncle's Favonius. It was a curious coincidence that the very first Rothschild horse to run on an English race-course, in 1852, was named (after him, presumably) Leopold. However, it was a long time before his breeding experiments had any outstanding success to their credit (though, as we shall see, he was associated with one remarkable fluke) and during his early seasons he was notoriously and deeply disappointed at the poor results

achieved by his efforts. Time was, however, to bring its compensation.

It was customary throughout the years Leopold de Rothschild's colours were known on the Turf to say of them that they were popular. The description was merited in a sense which it seldom is. They were popular because the horses that carried them were bred by their owner and were entered only in the best class of race, thus helping to raise the standard of the course. Their owner, too, was a very keen participant in the sport, and made no pretence of concealing his delights and his disappointments. He was extremely human in that respect. The nervous strain he underwent during the progress of a race, especially in his later years, was very marked; and, when success or defeat was made apparent, he was insensible to anything else. This emotional interest in racing contributed in no small measure to the widespread public interest in his colours. And, when he won, his delight knew no bounds. It was said that he was always the poorer for winning a rich race, because he would shower gifts on everyone within reach. (This was rather like another Jew, Baron de Hirsch, who was said to "race for the London Hospitals"; it is hardly necessary to point out that it was the gross receipts, not the profits, which he handed over.)

Leopold de Rothschild was also one of the leading breeders of thoroughbreds in the country. He bred for his own private stable, not for the public sale ring, and, though he won big prizes on the race-course and more than once figured foremost among the winning owners, it is quite certain that his hobby cost him a very great deal more than he received in the form of prize money.

His trainers were old Tom Cannon (who used to ride for him), his son Tom Cannon junior, Hayhoe and John Watson. His stables at Newmarket were a famous feature, and were frequently visited by King Edward when he stayed with him at Palace House: while his breeding stud, where so many famous horses were foaled, and where some of them afterwards became located as sires, was at Leighton Buzzard. The South Court stud was a source of endless delight to its owner, his greatest satisfaction being that its carefully-bred products, sires and mares alike, contributed so largely to the history of the Turf and the improvement of the British breed. And it was this, of which race-course successes were only the outward manifestation, which was his real object and chief pride.

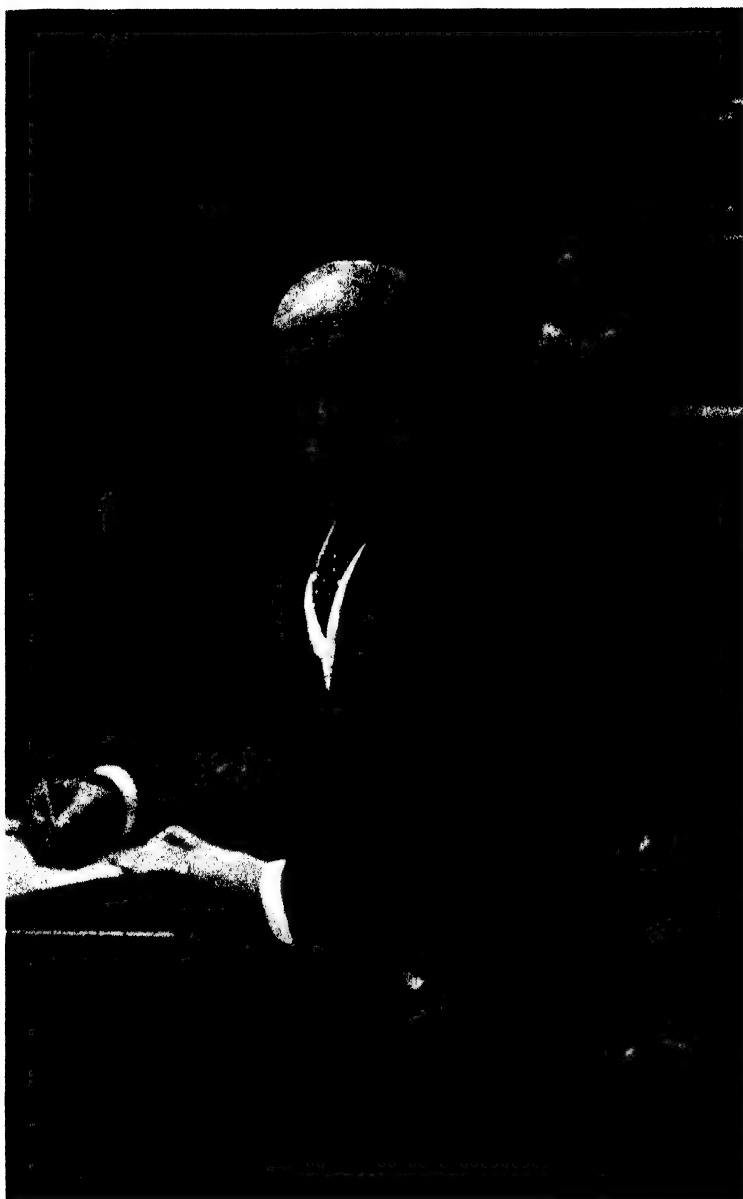
He was elected to the Jockey Club in 1891, and no member was more esteemed or took keener interest in the Club's administration of the affairs of the Turf. In this capacity, he was of course invited to Marlborough House and (later) to Buckingham Palace for the famous dinners on the eve of the Derby. In those days, countervailing hospitalities were arranged for the ladies; and while Mr. Leopold dined at the Palace, the lovely Mrs. de Rothschild—"Mrs. Leo" in the reminiscences of the Edwardian era—is recorded as having gone to Devonshire House (not then an apartment-house) to pass the evening with the wives of the other royal guests.

Leopold's racing career started in a blaze of misdirected glory, when he was only thirty-four. It was in 1879, when to the general surprise an unknown and very moderate horse named Sir Bevys, ridden by Fordham, won the Derby. It was a day of sensations. The winner had a surprisingly

poor record for a horse destined to win the highest honours. The time was three minutes two seconds—the longest on record since 1867, and never destined to be equalled until 1911. The Marlborough Club sweepstake was won by the Crown Prince, then in England on a visit. And it subsequently transpired that the owner, who had modestly called himself “Mr. Acton,” was in fact Leopold de Rothschild, nephew of that Baron Mayer whose memory was still fresh at every race-course. (The name had been adopted owing to the fact that Gunnersbury Park was on the outskirts of Acton). The value of the stake money was £7,025; but it was reported that the owner won £50,000 on the race owing to a few routine bets at heavy odds.

After this extremely unconventional beginning, two periods in Leopold de Rothschild’s racing career, which extended well over thirty years, stood out with special prominence. First there was the era of St. Frusquin, the great hope, and disappointment, of the turf in 1896: and secondly that of St. Amant, St. Frusquin’s son, who succeeded in accomplishing in 1904 what his sire had just failed to do eight years earlier.

The first was a son of the great St. Simon, and a horse of distinction from the first day he stepped on to a race-course. In 1895, on his first appearance in public as a two-year-old, he won the Royal Plate of £3,155 at Kempton Park. He proceeded without interruption to win the Sandringham Gold Cup of £2,085—a race which has long since ceased to exist—and the Chesterfield Stakes at Newmarket. Though beaten by Teufel for the Imperial Produce Stakes at Kempton Park, St. Frusquin proceeded to win the notable double event



LEOPOLD DE ROTHSCHILD



of the Middle Park Plate and the Dewhurst Plate. Thus in his first season on the Turf he won his owner £9,622 in stakes.

His three-year-old career was naturally of most interest, for it was then that he took part in the never-to-be-forgotten race for the Derby, which the Prince of Wales's horse Persimmon won amid the most extraordinary scenes of popular rejoicing. Before that happened, however, St. Frusquin had won both the Column Produce Stakes at Newmarket and the Two Thousand Guineas. In the circumstances it was no wonder that he started at odds of 13 to 8 for the Derby, for on all public form he seemed certain to win the Blue Riband of the Turf (as Disraeli had dubbed the great race not long since). Persimmon was as yet almost unknown, while St. Frusquin had carried almost everything before him. Watts, with his splendid riding record, rode for the Prince, and Tod Sloan, then at the zenith of his fame, wore the Rothschild colours. There was a great race between the rivals, horses and men, and Persimmon won by a neck. Watts's jockeyship and greater strength in the saddle may have influenced the result: but there might conceivably have been another interpretation if anyone else had been concerned. Lord Rosebery said to his servant John, after the race, that he supposed everyone would believe that all the horses had been stopped to enable the Prince of Wales to win the Derby. "No doubt," the faithful retainer replied, "But I am bound to tell your Lordship that many people thought the same thing when Ladas won and you were Prime Minister." The two horses met again, however, for the Princess of Wales's Stakes. This time, St. Frusquin, with an advantage of 3 lb. in the weights, won by half a length from



Persimmon, and a little later he won the valuable Eclipse Stakes.

Naturally followers of racing were keenly interested in the later doings of the two horses, and the prospective meeting of the pair for the St. Leger was anticipated with lively interest. The hope, however, was never realized. St. Frusquin, whose soundness had always been under some suspicion, broke down in his training, and could never be prepared for another race. He had brought his total winnings to £32,965, and at one time was reckoned to be worth £60,000! For Mrs. Leo to have him modelled by Lutiger and cast in silver by Fabergé at St. Petersburg as a sixty-seventh birthday present for her husband in 1912 was a slight, if unappreciated, tribute to a great horse; though in view of the animal's artistic temperament it was rather a strain, and at times a danger, to the artist.

In St. Frusquin's great year, 1896, Leopold de Rothschild headed the list of winning owners with £46,766 to his credit. Twelve months before, when his name had also figured foremost, his winnings had only been £20,749, his victories in the rich Princess of Wales's Stakes and Eclipse Stakes having been responsible for this remarkable difference. The record was approached by him only once again, in 1898, when his winnings amounted to some £40,000.

After the disappointment at Epsom in 1896, Leopold continued hopefully to try again for the Blue Riband of the Turf, though never with chances quite as good as those which had come to grief that year. However, his turn came at last in 1904. St. Amant's was a memorable Derby. This was not so much for the quality and class of

the winner as by reason of the fact that the race was run in a terrific thunderstorm. Extraordinary lightning, tremendous thunder and a tropical deluge of rain marked St. Amant's progress from start to finish. He wore blinkers, as is common with race-horses which are over-spirited, and it was said at the time that they assisted his victory, by keeping the rain out of his ears and eyes and deadening the thunder-claps. But the only living creature present who was completely oblivious to the appalling weather was the owner. He rushed out to meet his hero and led him in with beaming face, unconscious of the diluvian rain which in a few seconds drenched him to the skin, playing havoc with his elegant silk hat and immaculate morning suit. He was a proud and happy man, and that Derby Day in 1904 was perhaps the outstanding event of all in his full, but in no sense adventurous life.

All this, though, was but one aspect—perhaps the least important although the most conspicuous—of a peculiarly sweet nature. The real Leopold was not the sportsman but the philanthropist, the benefactor, the friend, and the body in which there beat the most generous heart in England. All succumbed to that charm—associates and subordinates and rulers and tradesmen and children and the most casual acquaintances. It could have been said of him as truly as it was of a kinsman and contemporary:

Of men like you  
Earth holds but few:  
An angel—with  
A revenue.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ROYAL ENCLOSURE

ON the same day in 1850 when the admission of Baron Lionel de Rothschild to Parliament was discussed for the first time, a message was brought from the Queen to her faithful Commons desiring that Marlborough House should be settled on the Prince of Wales when he attained the age of eighteen years.

This was symbolic of the future: for the three sons of Baron Lionel, utilizing to the full the emancipation which he had won, became in subsequent years prominent in the "Marlborough House Set" which gathered round the heir to the throne. The intimacy went back to the period when the future King was studying (or supposed to be studying) at Cambridge, when one of the few persons admitted to his society was young Nathaniel de Rothschild. The principal recommendation for this privilege was, no doubt, his impeccable reputation and the feeling that one whose interests were not quite those of England's ruling aristocracy might enlarge the heir apparent's outlook. Had it been realized that this was to be the prelude to a warm friendship, which was to extend to the entire family, to continue throughout life and to have a profound influence on the structure of English Society, it is not probable that those responsible would have been quite so complacent.

For, as time went on and the Prince of Wales

began to develop his own strongly-marked character, two things perhaps stood out, in addition to that hedonism which may so often be anticipated in the son of puritan parents (and which generally is compensated in part by a reaction in the next generation). One was his aversion from reading, and his determination to gather his information from men rather than from books. The other was to seek these sources of amusement and information wherever they might be found. He knew his position. He never allowed his intimates to forget theirs. But he did not care whether a man's ancestors came over with the Normans, or whether he had begun his career as a Hamburg bank-clerk, providing that he himself deserved attention.

The importance of this is not its bearing on theatrical gossip or fashionable scandal-mongering. It was in fact something of real importance in English social history. Hitherto, Society, with the capital S, had been a closed preserve, to be entered by hereditary right. Wealth, position, intelligence, counted for nothing—only parentage and grand-parentage. True, round this intransigent core there was a more tolerant circle, to which the new aristocracy of wealth, and sometimes even of brain, might hope for admittance. But the Inner Citadel kept its doors closed: and though Baron Lionel and his generation might pride themselves on the company they kept, they were perpetually mortified meanwhile at the thought of the company which they could not hope to keep.

Edward VII, as Prince of Wales, changed all that. It was not merely that he did not object to the New Rich or to self-made men: it was that he showed a positive predilection for them. And those

to whom the doors of Marlborough House were flung wide open, and who were given the privilege of entertaining in turn the master of Marlborough House, could not very well be snubbed and excluded by those who (though they would not admit it) would have sold their hopes of immortality for admission to those same august portals and to that same enviable familiarity. In consequence, English Society was saved from the awful fate of becoming like New York society and its Three Hundred Families. It became in fact (though it hardly seems the right word to use in this connexion) democratic—open, with certain reservations, to all, not closed to all but a few. And, since snobbery is, whether one likes to admit it or no, one of the most potent forces in man (in the Englishman at least) and since nothing is more enraging to a man of ability than to find doors closed before him simply because they were not open to his father, this democratization added perceptibly to the stability of the country. The Republicanism of the eighteen-sixties and eighteen-seventies gradually became ridiculous. At the turn of the century, the Throne and the Royal Family acted as a centre of attraction, and hence of stability, in a manner which would have appeared impossible forty or fifty years before.

Lady Dorothy Neville described the process of adjustment with eminent good sense:

When this incursion first began, English Society, shrewd and far-seeing enough in its way, easily perceived that the millionaires, keen-witted, pushing, clever and energetic, would engulf it in their capacious maw. So everywhere doors were flung open for Croesus to enter; his

faults were overlooked, his virtues (and many a one really had virtues) lauded: historic houses passed into his hands, whilst the original possessors besought his good offices for their sons embarking on City careers. On the whole, the result has not perhaps been bad, for everything must change and pass away, and there was no reason why "Society," a relic of aristocratic days, should have proved an exception to this rule.

Only one thing is omitted in this shrewd account—the part played by the Prince of Wales and Marlborough House, where he held his lesser (but unconventional) court. And, in the Marlborough House Set, the three Rothschild brothers were prominent almost from the very first. The familiarity was not looked upon with favour at the beginning by those in authority. It was not only a matter of the historic prejudice, which even at the close of the nineteenth century, and when members of the most illustrious Anglo-Jewish family were in question, could not be entirely discarded. There was also some anxiety lest the unguarded tongue of the heir to the throne might make secret negotiations and lines of policy known to New Court, which would take advantage of the fact. But the Rothschilds were discreet, and the Prince consistently under-informed: and so the fears turned out to be unjustified.

Not only did the Prince tolerate Jewish (and, above all, Rothschild) society. He showed an absolute *penchant* for it. No other family was privileged to send out so many of those emblazoned cards of invitation, bearing the coveted formula, "to have the honour of meeting Their Royal Highnesses, the Prince and Princess of Wales."

He appreciated their characters. He was occasionally obliged for their generosity. He enjoyed the feeling that he had in their well-informed company, primed with information which his mother's ministers carefully kept from him, that after all he was at the hub of affairs. He liked Jewish hospitality and roared with laughter over Jewish jokes, which the brothers collected for him systematically. (At least one foreign diplomat, Baron von Eckardstein, had standing orders from the Rothschilds to collect and report all the good jokes he heard abroad—especially Stock Exchange puns from Berlin—*ad usum delphini*. On more than one occasion, so he said, he even dispatched bons-mots by wire to New Court, whence they would find their way before long to Marlborough House.) He stayed at their country houses up and down the Vale of Aylesbury. He attended Leopold's wedding. He was a guest at Alfred's wonderful house-warming at Halton. He had the brothers to stay with him at Sandringham. (It was not for them to refuse such invitations, as did Lord Charles Beresford with his famous wire: "Can't possibly. Lie follows by post.") On his frequent visits to Paris, he saw a great deal of Baron and Baroness Alphonse, and had no objection to renewing the acquaintance, especially of the latter, when they came over to London. He never missed the opportunity, when he was taking the cure at Homburg, of going over to see Baroness Willy at her country estate at Koenigstein, who was so friendly with his sister, the Empress Frederick.

He was introduced by the Rothschilds too to their brothers-in-law, the Sassoons, with whom they were doubly connected (not only were Mrs. Leopold de Rothschild and Mrs. Arthur Sassoon

sisters, but their cousin Aline, daughter of Gustave de Rothschild of Paris, married Sir Edward Sassoon, and on her arrival in London society created a furore among the "Souls" grouped round Arthur Balfour and Margot Tennant).

With the members of this remarkable Iraki-Jewish-Anglo-Indian family—more remarkable in their way than the Rothschilds themselves—His Royal Highness was soon on a similarly familiar footing, using them to place his bets, staying with them at their unpretentious house on Brighton front, and filling his car with the exotic fruits which they had on the table in honour of his presence. But it was above all to the Rothschilds that he turned for advice, and even for comfort: and, on the evening of the day when he appeared in the witness-box in the Tranby-Croft case, it was in the company of Alfred de Rothschild and Sir Arthur Sullivan that he spent the evening at the Amphytrion Club in Albemarle Street, where the former tried to raise his spirits by strumming cheerful waltzes on the piano.

The Jewish community looked on with bated breath: and the humblest East End tailor or Soho dressmaker felt personally flattered when he read that His Royal Highness had stayed with Lord Rothschild at Tring, or shot with Mr. Leopold at Leighton Buzzard.

A prominent figure in the Royal Enclosure was another Rothschild, who had come over from abroad to make good (as it were) the dearth caused in male representatives of the family in England by the regrettable tendency of Baron Lionel's two brothers to beget only daughters. For the Rothschilds of this era had a disconcerting knack of being, not so much international as ambinational.



A perfectly good Austrian would convert himself into an English country gentleman, almost indistinguishable from the genuine article, whereas scions of the English house would change their minds and become typical continentals. At one time, it was anticipated that Sir Anthony de Rothschild was to have taken up his residence in Paris. But instead his younger brother Nathaniel (as we have seen) married a daughter of the head of the French house and became a Frenchman. It was his son, James, who founded the Société des Anciens Textes Français, wrote that superb work, *Introduction au mystère du Vieil Testament*, and brought together one of the most magnificent French libraries in existence during the brief thirty-seven years of his life. More quintessentially French was his son, Henri de Rothschild, who, besides being a physician of really considerable note and a valiant worker in the cause of infant welfare, has also achieved a considerable reputation as a playwright under the name of André Pascal, and has written an amazingly frank (one almost wrote "Frank Harris") volume of reminiscences. His most enduring title to fame, though, was his assassination in a moment of aberration by *Who's Who* fifteen years ago: for outside its pages (in which indeed he was subsequently resuscitated) he continued to enjoy robust life.<sup>1</sup>

It is tantalizing to speculate how "André Pascal" would have developed had Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild brought his wife over to London, instead of transferring himself to her at Paris. The student of the Influence of Environment on Char-

<sup>1</sup> Another son of Nathaniel's was the jovial Arthur de Rothschild, a famous yachtsman and historian of the Post and Postage-stamps, who was very well known indeed also in London and was caricatured, like so many other members of his family, in the famous series of *Vanity Fair* cartoons.

acter may however draw some interesting conclusions from the somewhat parallel case of his nephew and (through many channels) cousin, Ferdinand James, son of Freiherr Anselm von Rothschild of Vienna and of Charlotte, daughter of Nathan Mayer of London. For him, too, a match was found within the family, with his first cousin Evelina, second daughter of Baron Lionel. It was on the occasion of this marriage, in June 1865, that the new Rothschild mansion in Piccadilly was opened. Among those present were several royalties, more than one Minister of the Crown and the Ambassadors of France and Austria, as well as much lesser fry. The bridesmaids included members of the families of Montgomery, Lennox and Beauclerk, as well as dark-eyed beauties of more ancient lineage. Dizzy proposed the health of the bride and bridegroom, and the First Lord of the Admiralty that of the family. The Duke of Cambridge was one of the Royalty who attended the great ball in the evening, where he found all the Diplomatic Corps and a goodly proportion of the House of Commons, chosen without reference to political allegiance.

The bridegroom's father had two passions, Art and Banking. Ferdinand (like his brother, yet another Nathaniel) inherited the former only, leaving the latter to his other brother Albert, subsequently head of the Vienna house. This was one reason that led him to adopt his wife's country as his own. Another was his close attachment to his mother. For the old Freiherr, though a masterly financier, was less successful as a husband, and his wife ultimately left him to seek refuge in her native country, where Ferdinand had followed her even before his marriage. Now, English on his mother's

side as well as on his wife's, he settled down as an Englishman.

The marriage was brief, but deliriously happy. Only eighteen months afterwards, the bride died in child-bed. Her husband was broken-hearted. It was in memory of this tragic loss that he established and partially supported the Evelina Hospital for Sick Children in London—one of the very first in England in which proper consideration was given to light and ventilation. He survived her by over thirty years. But to his last day the memory of his loss remained poignant as it had ever been, and his death was actually caused by a chill caught when paying one of his periodic visits to her grave.

The bereaved husband remained faithful not only to his wife's memory, but also to her country. He too maintained his town house in "Rothschild Row" in Piccadilly, a few doors off his father-in-law. In the Rothschild country in Buckinghamshire, he set up his magnificent establishment, to which we shall revert. And "Ferdy" too (as all the world called him) became a member of the Royal Enclosure, entertaining the Prince of Wales both in town and country, and on one memorable occasion having the honour to welcome Queen Victoria as well—a distinction which none of his English-born cousins ever attained.

Ferdy's hospitality was Rothschildian, with the habitual Rothschild extravagances and reservations. Like more than one other of the family, his digestion was ruined by a plethora of culinary indulgence: and his guests' appetites were not improved by the tray of bottles which—a dreadful warning—made its appearance before him each mealtime. He had sufficient wealth to command from his distinguished guests the courtesies which lesser

persons accord as a matter of course. "You know Ferdy is rather a funny person about his parties," wrote Lady de Grey to Henry Chaplin, "and does not like to be kept long waiting for an answer."

When the Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria came to London, he gave a famous ball in his honour in the great white ballroom, at which the Prince of Wales too was present. A few days previous, the host invited ten or twelve of his lady guests to luncheon, and offered them all new dresses from Doucet for the dance. Needless to say, they all accepted, gladly: but one at least was a little mortified when he refused to pay for the petticoat she had ordered to go with the dress, saying that he had not given any authorization for it. It was at his London mansion that Edward saw "Dr." Lynd perform his famous box-trick, as the world was proudly informed afterwards by the hero of the occasion.

Year after year, he took a house for Goodwood. Each time he invited the same small party—Lily Langtry, Harry Tyrwhitt, Lord and Lady Gerard and one or two others. They would go down together by special saloon and would be served *en route* with a Rothschildian lunch, though the dyspeptic host had to content himself with a little dry toast. Immediately they arrived, he went foraging about to satisfy the creature comforts of his guests. But his solicitude could sometimes be disconcerting: and once a lady's screams when her dress caught on fire as she was dressing for dinner, instead of bringing him to the rescue, only filled him with resentment against the owners of the house who (he was convinced) had left a noisy child behind.

In 1874, Baron Ferdinand, to whom the English

countryside meant that part of the country where his cousins had their estates, purchased Lodge Hill from the Duke of Marlborough—a lofty piece of ground overlooking the Vale of Aylesbury and facing Halton. With it went further properties in Upper Winchendon, Waddesdon and Westcott—a considerable tract, the purchase price of which was said to be £200,000. Lodge Hill was a desolate and bleak spot. That, however, meant nothing to Rothschild wealth and Rothschild determination: and it was here, to the amusement of his cousins, that Ferdinand determined to erect his seat. One of the most distinguished French architects of the time, the younger Déstailleur (the same who built the chapel at Farnborough for the remains of Napoleon III and his family), was brought over from Paris: and on the desolate height, in the incongruous surroundings of the Buckinghamshire countryside, there arose a palatial building of glistening white marble, Waddesdon Manor.

It was a magnificent replica of a French renaissance château, marred only by its excess of perfection. Even Eustace Balfour, who was so scathing in his criticism of Alfred de Rothschild's house at Halton, considered it exquisite, particularly as regards the interior. The most noteworthy features here were the superb spiral staircases, copied from those of the famous Château Chenonceau. Outside, an ornate French garden designed by Lainé completed the Gallic illusion. The once-bare ground surrounding this gave place to a park famous for its chestnuts, which had been transplanted without any regard to expense for considerable distances—in some instances even from overseas. It was an almost miraculous transformation. The other gardens, rockeries, fountains, menagerie

and aviary clustered round the house projected something of the Waddesdon magnificence into the countryside. Around stretched the estates—1,000 acres in all—on which the owner built one of the first model villages in England, with churches and chapels and schools.

Here Ferdy settled down to the life of the English country gentleman. He played a prominent role in the life of the local countryside. He hunted, he shot, he bred fat stock; and when he left Buckinghamshire and was not in London, he was generally to be found yachting—a pastime of which he was passionately fond. (The walls of yacht clubs such as the Royal Temple Yacht Club at Ramsgate were covered with his gifts.)

By its very incongruity, Waddesdon Manor became something more than a seven days' wonder. Baron Ferdinand entertained royally and royalty, as it was phrased. Statesmen, business men, peers of the realm and society beauties angled for invitations to the famous "Saturday to Monday" parties—the phrase "week-end" had not yet been coined, though he seems to have been one of the authors of the institution. Guy de Maupassant came to stay with him and, unable to conceal his gratification, bragged about it long afterwards. (Subsequently, his host returned the compliment at Etretat.) The Emperor Frederick did not disdain an invitation, nor his wife the Empress, nor the Princess Beatrice, nor—on more occasions than one—the heir to the Throne himself. The Shah of Persia passed the night there after lunching one day at Halton, admired all the wrong things, and was met by the Prince of Wales and his two sons (the younger was later to ascend the throne as George V) and the Duke of Cambridge.

The climax came when the Queen herself, having heard from her children of the marvels of Waddesdon, and of the wonderful gardens that had been achieved out of a bare hill, intimated her intention of seeing them for herself, and spent a day there on May 14th, 1890. It was a memorable occasion. Lord Hartington (later Duke of Devonshire) was one of the house party assembled to receive her, and in a moment of abstraction shook the hand which was extended to him instead of kissing it, as was *de rigueur*. The Queen was so upset at this breach of etiquette that, during the rest of the visit, she kept her hand to herself. Nevertheless, the rest of the day went off admirably, and she thoroughly enjoyed her excursion round the grounds in a bath-chair with a little pony to draw it. "The host was as delightful as the place was beautiful," was her verdict. But that same spiral staircase which was the glory of Waddesdon one day turned traitor, when the Prince of Wales slipped on it and severely hurt himself; though his first thought was to exonerate his host from all blame.

Having entered so intimately into the life of the countryside, only one thing was necessary to complete the transmogrification into the English country gentleman. The opportunity came when Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild was raised to the peerage in 1885. Baron Ferdinand already had Parliamentary aspirations—not long before he had been adopted as Liberal candidate for St. George's in the East. Now he was invited to contest the new peer's vacated seat at Aylesbury. It was a hard-fought contest—the sands of nineteenth-century Liberalism were running out, and there may have been some resentment locally at the treatment of a Parliamentary constituency as a family appanage.



“ Ferdy ”  
BARON FERDINAND DE ROTHSCHILD  
*Caricature by “ Hay ”*





However, the Rothschild had a majority of 900 in a total poll of 4,000. Shortly after, the Aylesbury division lost its identity as the result of the Redistribution Act. Ferdinand now became member for its successor, the new constituency of Mid-Buckinghamshire—at first as Liberal, and then, when the great split took place, as a Liberal Unionist.

When Joseph Chamberlain led his followers into opposition, Baron Ferdinand, in common with most of the other members of the family, followed him, and was a familiar figure lounging back on his seat in "Chamberlain Corner"—the third and fourth benches below the gangway on the Ministerial side. He abandoned the family tradition in Parliament in one respect. He sometimes spoke in debate, though neither frequently nor well. His influence in welding together the various wings of the new opposition, on the other hand, was by no means inconsiderable.

It was at Waddesdon, indeed, that Lord Randolph Churchill and Lord Hartington had made up their differences with one another and with Joseph Chamberlain (one of Baron Ferdinand's most regular guests) in view of Gladstone's expected surrender to Irish Nationalism: and it was under the same hospitable roof that Arthur Balfour came together with the latter one week-end in 1886, and, in the incongruous setting of eighteenth-century French art, pursued the conversations that were to have their ultimate result in the formation of the Conservative-Unionist alliance.

Perhaps because he had so little to do with the making of money, Baron Ferdinand was particularly generous in disposing of it. He took the responsibilities of his wealth and position very

seriously. On one occasion, he offered £2,000 to any person who could suggest a useful way of spending it—an offer which had as its ultimate outcome the establishment of the Army Reservists' Home. In the Vale of Aylesbury, he played Lord Bountiful, all the more devotedly since there was now no Lady Bountiful to back his efforts. But his benefactions were not merely parochial. The day after royalty visited Waddesdon they might be succeeded by a party of poor women from the East End, who were entertained to tea. So as not to shame them, as well as by natural inclination, the host would on that day be simple—even slovenly—in his dress; and once, to his joy, a new and officious under-gardener warned him sharply off his own lawns, which he was slouching across pipe in mouth. He worked hard—not merely by his financial support—for such bodies as the Jewish Board of Guardians in London, then severely taxed by the flow of refugees from the Russian pogroms. On one occasion, having been unable to have a meal before he arrived to sit on one of the Committees, he begged a crust of bread to allay his hunger—the only occasion, probably, when a Rothschild had been recipient of such relief!

He used to shoot over his estates year by year, with painstaking conscientiousness and in the highest company. But he had some difficulty in knowing what to do with the proceeds. (He was not like his Uncle Anthony, to whom Dizzy in thanking him for "a battalion of pheasants and some hares," had written: "No one in that direction could be so magnificent except yourself. You not only send many pheasants, but you send pheasants worth eating.") Such wasteful superfluity seemed to Ferdy a little ridiculous; while it

would hardly be in the best taste to distribute them indiscriminately to passers-by. At last, an idea came to him—an idea which Cousin Leo approved of, and which they carried out in collaboration. At Christmas, every busman on the routes which passed his door—drivers and conductors alike—received a brace of pheasants from the jovial couple; and, from Piccadilly, the practice extended, until at one time it embraced the whole of London. In recognition, each December, the whips of the drivers and the bell-cord on the conductor's platform were decorated with blue and amber ribbons, the Rothschild racing colours. There was a tragic change in December 1898, when the blue and amber were intertwined with black in mourning for the originator of the idea, who passed away just a week before Christmas. But the tradition of giving (now left in the hands of Leopold and his brothers) and the picturesque recognition continued many more years, well after the drivers' whips had given place to the steering-wheel and the horse-buses had been relegated to the limbo of antiquity.

A few days after Baron Ferdinand's death, his wide circle of friends received from him their usual Christmas presents. Though very well aware that his illness was likely to be fatal, he had made arrangements for them to be dispatched in good time.

Waddesdon Manor was inherited by Alice Rothschild, sister of the former owner, who previously had acquired the neighbouring estate of Eythrope Priory (formerly the property of Sir William Stanhope, one of the so-called Monks of La Trappe who used to perform complicated obscenities at Medmenham Abbey in the reign of

George III—an incongruous ghost to haunt a maiden lady's boudoir). Her principal delight was her villa at Grasse, with its magnificent gardens, which Queen Victoria loved to visit daily when she was in the South of France. There she would drive with her large white sunshade, comfortably installed in her donkey chair; behind panted the Princesses, doing their best to keep up, not always with success. On one occasion, Her Majesty in the course of one of her promenades began to walk over a newly-planted border on which great trouble had been expended. "Come off at once!" commanded her hostess, peremptorily. It was many, many years since the Queen Empress had been dictated to in quite such tones.

Ferdy's death, in his sixtieth year, deprived the Marlborough House Set, before it had properly become the Royal Enclosure, of one of its most popular figures. But Rothschilds were still represented in it in more than sufficient numbers. It was at the Prince of Wales's personal request that the eldest of the brothers became Treasurer of the fund for the hospitals raised on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, later known as King Edward's Hospital Fund. The day was to come when the royal intimacy was elevated to a yet more august plane, when the Prince of Wales became King Edward VII. All three of the brothers figured in the Coronation Honours, the peer being created a Knight, and the two others Companions, of the Royal Victorian Order: a good deal more, in this case, than the formality that it generally was. For the new Sovereign's predilection for Rothschild company, Rothschild hospitality, and Rothschild jokes, did not diminish, now that His Royal Highness had become His Majesty.

Indeed, he was willing to put his friendship to the supreme test by doing something in return, even though it involved a distinct effort at a difficult moment.

It has been necessary to refer elsewhere in this volume to the bloody persecution of the Jews in Russia which disgraced the last decades of the government of the Tsars, and which hung like a cloud over the life of Jews throughout the world, who could not be deaf to the groans of their suffering co-religionists. It was greatly to the credit of the House of Rothschild, and of its English branch in particular, that, even though they might be enjoying the luxury of a royal enclosure, they neither closed their ears nor pretended to, but on the contrary exerted all their influence, in every possible manner, to bring about some amelioration in the shocking state of affairs which prevailed. When in the new reign the Triple Entente between England, France and Russia was in the process of formation, a unique opportunity seemed to present itself: for it was hoped that the St. Petersburg government, admitted to respectable company, would now attempt to justify the fact by removing the most glaring of its domestic abuses. And so when in 1908 King Edward went to Reval to meet the Tsar officially, the three Rothschild brothers wrote him an earnest letter telling him of the renewal of fierce religious persecution in Russia and begging him to use his influence with the Tsar to bring about some sort of improvement in the condition of the Jews of that country. The communication was couched in the most poignant terms, and, six days before the encounter was due to take place, elicited from the King's Private Secretary, Lord Knollys, the following reply (addressed to

Lord Rothschild), which indicated how seriously it was taken:

June 3rd, 1908.

The King desires me to let you know, in reply to the letter which you, Alfred and Leo have written to him, that he will speak to Sir Charles Hardinge and Sir Arthur Nicholson respecting the question which you have brought before him.

The subject would be a very delicate one for him to bring before the Emperor of Russia, and it is, moreover, one of considerable political importance.

His Majesty feels therefore that it would not be constitutionally correct or proper for him to speak to the Emperor or to his advisers on the matter unless he did so with the full consent of Sir C. Hardinge and Sir Arthur Nicholson, both of whom accompany him to Reval.

The King duly consulted Hardinge (the British Ambassador to St. Petersburg) and Nicholson (Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, afterwards Lord Carnock) and it was decided that the matter might well be raised during the course of the general conversations with the Russian Prime Minister, though hardly to any good effect in those with the Tsar himself. At the talks on June 13th, the matter was accordingly discussed, and apparently not ill-received by the other side. During the course of the following week, Hardinge sent Lord Rothschild an extract of the report of Nicholson's interview on the subject with Stolypin. "From this report," he wrote, "you will see that the Russian Prime Minister contemplates legislation for the amelioration of the lot of the Jews in Russia." In point of

fact, this was no more than window-dressing. Russian Jewry continued to groan under a yoke more heavy than that of the Pharaohs, and hardly less heavy than that of our contemporaries, until a greater cataclysm saved them, to bury them in the end under the ruins. But it was something that the Russian Government considered that window-dressing was desirable: and it was a justification of England's humanity that—then—she did not allow the persecution to continue without voicing officially her profound abhorrence.

Edward's reign was not destined to be a long one: indeed, the reign of no Edward has been since the fourteenth century. There came that bleak spring day in 1910 when the nation lost a popular ruler, and the Rothschilds a beloved friend. It was for them a double blow. Max Beerbohm exaggerated the issue in one of his most pointed caricatures. The members of the former Royal Enclosure, Rothschilds among them, are shown waiting in the ante-chamber, with the inscription: "Are we as welcome as ever?" Of course they were not. No man takes over his father's friends and continues his father's relations with them quite unmodified. The esteem may continue or even be enhanced, and no small part of the intimacy: but there is not that community of interests, of recollections and of life. The three magnificent brothers—all elderly by now—were essentially Edwardians: and, with the slightly premature close of the Edwardian era, they entered upon their brief twilight.



## CHAPTER X

### ROTHSCHILD ROW

IN 1825 Nathan Rothschild, realizing that the time was passing when a banker of such status as his could live above his counting-house, removed (not without encouragement from his wife) from Number 2 New Court, St. Swithin's Lane, which was in future given over entirely to business. Henceforth he was installed at Number 107 Piccadilly—Mrs. Coutt's former residence, where Blücher had stayed during his famous visit to London in 1814. But this was not quite palatial enough for his son, who in the eighteen-sixties began to construct a new mansion for himself a little way off, in an even more fashionable setting, where Piccadilly widens out into a piazza which anywhere else but in London would be dignified with a magniloquent title and be considered a touristic Mecca.

His new home was at 148 Piccadilly—next door to the Duke of Wellington's famous residence, Apsley House. It could thus be considered, according to taste, the first, or the last, house in London. The windows in front overlooked the wide expanse of Hyde Park Corner and the Green Park beyond: those to the rear overlooked Hyde Park itself. But the most remarkable view was from the top of the mansion, where the grandchildren of successive generations would be taken and be shown an iron chair on the edge of the roof of

Apsley House. It had been placed there, it was said, by the Iron Duke himself in his old age, so that he could watch the troops marching along Piccadilly without being observed.

The Rothschild mansion is six stories high: but the next-door house, Number 146, is a little loftier (a fact which is not immediately discernible from the pavement). Thereby hangs a story—if one may be permitted the pun. It is said that while Baron Lionel was thinking about building his home, he was anxious to secure this mansion, which belonged to a fellow-banker, Sir Edmund Antrobus, and throw it into his own. Antrobus, peeved at the request, which he considered to be a slight upon his own status, not only refused, but had an additional attic storey built to his own house to make it overtop his rival's.

The house was executed according to the ideas of Baron Lionel himself, and was filled by him with his accumulated treasures. As the visitor entered he found himself in an enormous rectangular hall, with a wide marble staircase rising in the centre. This led up to the ballroom on the first floor, which stretched the complete length of the front of the house and looked from its magnificent windows over the Park towards Buckingham Palace. This was said to be one of the most sumptuous apartments in London. The decorations included four large reliefs by Thorwaldsen, the great Danish sculptor; and the windows were hung with immense sweeping curtains of satin embroidered with river goddesses and other allegorical figures. On the other hand, the combined effect of the hall, staircase and ballroom was so overwhelming that the other rooms, large as they were, seemed comparatively small. For the modern taste, the general

effect was too sumptuous, too ornate, too restless, too piled with detail, to be acceptable as an everyday background. Every room was decorated with marble and gold and scarlet; every chair seemed (as a contemporary wit has said) to offer gilt-edged security. A sensitive visitor to-day might perhaps blush; but it was one of the marvels of mid-Victorian London.

The house-warming, on June 7th, 1865, was combined with the wedding of the owner's second daughter, Evelina, to her cousin Ferdinand, of Vienna, of which some account has been given in the previous chapter. The guests included half of London society, and the wedding-luncheon was attended by some of the greatest names in England. Dizzy was there (as usual) to propose the bride's health, with many others of about equal standing in the world of politics to support him. This put the Baron into something of a quandary. "Ben," he called across the table to the leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, pointing to the Jewish minister, who was clearing his throat preparatory to concluding the proceedings, "Our *Chazan* wants to know whether, as there are so many of you Christians present, he had not better read the Grace instead of chanting it." "Tell him to sing it, by all means," Dizzy replied, "I like to hear the old-fashioned tunes."

It was in the magnificent mansion that he had built that Baron Lionel died, that Tuesday morning in 1879. His eldest son subsequently gave up his house in Buckingham Palace Gate and, in full feudal style, entered into occupation of the parental abode, which as long as he lived was the centre of the family's private life and of its social activities.

The principal Rothschild citadel had several

outlying fortresses. A couple of doors off, at 143 Piccadilly (next-door to the house once occupied by the present King and Queen), Baron Ferdinand had his mansion, decorated in the most exquisite Louis Seize style, with the famous white ballroom. One house further down from this, at 142, there was the residence of the latter's sister Alice. Adjoining the verdant garden to the rear, at 5 Hamilton Place, Leopold de Rothschild maintained his establishment for many years. Thus the little row of houses standing in their aristocratic seclusion at the top of Piccadilly, provided with a sort of private Hyde Park of their own, and shut off from the turmoil of the street by their own forecourt and railings, became almost a family preserve—"Rothschild Row," as the wits called it. It was very different from that other, but in its way nobler, enclosure, the Frankfort Ghetto, where the family had lived a century before.

A little further off there were other more isolated Rothschild bastions. A short way down the road, at 107 Piccadilly, next to the St. James's Club, the original West-end mansion which Nathan Rothschild had acquired in 1825 was occupied by Baron Mayer, his youngest son, passing after his death, first to his widow, then to their daughter Hannah, who was to become Countess of Rosebery. Round the corner, off Park Lane, Alfred dispensed his marvellous hospitality at 1 Seamore Place: while for years after Sir Anthony's death his widow continued to maintain her establishment at 19 Grosvenor Place.

This group of houses was for nearly half a century one of the pivots of London society. All were distinguished, like the family's country residences (or most of them), by the same lavishness and the

same rich opulence. It was unlucky for the Rothschild family that they were at their apogee precisely at the period when English taste was at its nadir. A century before, they could have patronized great craftsmen and filled their houses with great contemporary creations. But in the second half of the nineteenth century they could only search the world for the artistic achievements of the past, cram the rooms with the gilded gew-gaws of the present, and attempt to atone for absence of form by excess of ornament. It was not their sin. It was the sin of the age; and it was their misfortune that they were among the age's most characteristic sons.

But, at the same time, their houses were more than places of occasional resort. They were the setting for full and active lives: they were hubs of a far-reaching social activity: they were the scenes of a generous hospitality, which was in its way their justification. And this Rothschild hospitality was as famous in the second half of the nineteenth century as Rothschild financial achievement had been in the first half. In previous pages something of this has been mentioned incidentally, in connexion with individual members of the family. But it was the case with all. All the Rothschilds gave famous parties in superb surroundings, all entertained some of the most famous men and women of their time, all had renowned chefs. There was no other family which blended so admirably *la haute finance*, *la haute politique*, *la haute cuisine*.

"I dined at Sir N. Rothschild's on Wednesday; said to be the best dinner in London, and always charming society," wrote Dizzy once to Lady Bradford. That was in 1876; but, with the appropriate change of first name and title, it might have

applied to any period within forty years, before or after. Gunnersbury had shown in former days a magnificence which anticipated or exceeded that of Rothschild Row: indeed, its hospitality was intentionally organized something on the model of Holland House, the great centre of Whig politicians and historians. "A most beautiful park and a villa worthy of an Italian Prince," was Disraeli's description, "though decorated with a taste and splendour which a French financier in the olden times could alone have rivalled. We had a cheering concert, a banquet of illimitable delicacies, and, at the end, a ball. All the world of grandeur was present." "The banquet not to be surpassed in splendour or *recherché* even at Windsor or Buckingham Palace," he wrote on another occasion.

He described it again, with only the faintest disguise, in *Endymion*. "Sunday was always a great day at Hainault. The Royal and the Stock Exchanges were always fully represented; and they often had an opportunity, which they highly appreciated, of seeing and conferring with some public characters, M.P.'s of note or promise, and occasionally a secretary of the Treasury or Privy Councillor. 'Turtle makes all men equal,' Adrian [Neuchatel] would observe." The last-named delicacy, its un-Mosaic character notwithstanding (it has neither fins nor scales) was one of the Gunnersbury specialities. "I got well waited on by our old friend Amy, who brought me some capital turtle, which otherwise I should have missed," the future Premier informed his sister after a visit in 1843.

But the visitors were more remarkable even than the fare on which they were regaled. The old mansion would often see the King of Hanover and his brothers the Dukes of Cambridge and Sussex,

Queen Victoria's none-too-beloved uncles. Wellington himself would come there, and foreign princes and diplomats, and all the more intelligent members of London society would welcome invitations. The most famous artistes of the time—the *prima donna* Giulia Grisi, or Tamburini, or Lablache, those same human nightingales whom the Queen was so happy to welcome at Buckingham Palace—would sing. Rossini would come over from Paris and give excerpts from his operas, as he did in Uncle James's house in the Rue Laffitte. Supper was laid in pavilions specially erected in the Park, and the choicest dishes were served.

A *fête champêtre*, held in July 1845 in honour of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and the Duchess of Gloucester, was reckoned the most brilliant function of the entire season; and the guests included 600 of the most disdainful of English aristocracy, as well as nearly the whole of the diplomatic corps. But on less remarkable occasions the company was nearly as illustrious. The future Emperor of the French would sometimes drive down in D'Orsay's cabriolet from Kensington Gore. Greys and Stanhopes, during a spell of political bitterness, might find themselves sitting at the same board. After the Revolution of 1848, all the illustrious French exiles were to be met there: the Duchess of Orleans, the Count of Paris, his brother the Duke of Chartres, the Duke and Duchess of Aumale, and all their sisters. Cardinal Wiseman did not scorn an invitation, even though under the rule of the Popes no Jew might venture to live outside the Ghetto in Rome or even employ a Christian domestic. (On one occasion, another visitor, a strongly Evangelical Protestant, refused to sit down to table with him—much to the

indignation of the Baroness, who admitted herself baffled by this type of Christian charity.) The diplomatic corps sometimes turned out full strength as for a royal levee. Sydney Smith would keep the table in a roar with his sallies. Lord Lyndhurst would deplore the tendency of the times. Monckton Milnes, just back from the Levant, would seek a little of the Oriental colouring he had begun to miss; Macaulay, that Liberal of Liberals, would find himself in his element, and would keep the company sitting so long over breakfast that it almost overlapped with luncheon. If the more traditional and less readable sort of historian was desired, Ranke and Grote were often there to redress the balance—the latter, of course, a fellow-banker as well as the chronicler of one of the younger peoples of antiquity.

At a later stage, the Ambassadorial visitors were reinforced by the representative of the Mikado, who (it is related) was on one occasion taken round the famous Japanese garden. "What does Your Excellency think of it?" inquired his host, anxiously, when the visit of inspection was over. "It is marvellous," said the Oriental. "We have nothing like it in Japan."

But more magnificent than the entertainments at Gunnersbury, though lacking their sylvan setting, were the great formal dinners under Baron Lionel and his son at 148 Piccadilly. These would be served, when the importance of the occasion merited it, off a silver table-service by Garrard weighing all told (including the dinner and soup-plates) nearly 10,000 ounces. Alternatively, use might be made of the famous apple-green service of Sèvres china, partly painted by Le Bel. It was at one of these dinners in 1876 that Disraeli made his



secret overtures to Count Shewaldo, the Russian Ambassador, which nearly resulted in clearing up the Balkan tangle at an early stage.

Besides the formal banquets, Baron Lionel loved to entertain his friends at small dinners on Sunday evenings. These became a regular institution. Delane of *The Times* would nearly always be there, and Dizzy, and Bernal Osborne, and Charles Villiers (the famous Free Trade M.P. for Wolverhampton), as well as a few younger men of promise—such as the ill-fated Henry Calcroft and the later Lord Redesdale—and one or two beautiful women to inspire the wits to greater efforts. The conversation was brilliant, though Disraeli tended to divert it to one invariable channel—the Jews. “What did you talk about last night?” inquired a friend, meeting Baron Lionel in Piccadilly one Monday morning. “Oh, the Race, as usual,” replied the Baron, somewhat gloomily.

Disraeli repaid in part this lavish hospitality by his flattering picture of the Baron as Sidonia, in his *Coningsby*. It is an idealized portrait, but not beyond recognition: a Jewish banker, master of great wealth, endowed with every accomplishment, the perfect host and counsellor and friend and *deus ex machina* in one—“an ideal Rothschild, a Rothschild equipped not only with great wealth, but with a penetrating and all-embracing intellectual vision,” as Disraeli’s biographer has put it, and in addition endowed with some of Disraeli’s own imaginative qualities. “Sidonia is indeed a god, and perhaps as near to the deity of Disraeli’s religion as we are ever likely to get.” There is a rather more moderate portrait, yet easily recognizable, as Adrian Neuchatel in *Endymion*, where Baroness Lionel too figures as Mrs. Neuchatel

with her simple unworldliness, her interest in science, literature and philanthropy and her enthusiastic style. From *Coningsby*, this flamboyant picture strayed into the works of Disraeli's contemporaries, a little magnified or distorted. Thackeray, in his *Codlingsby*, was amusing; Trollope, in *Barchester Towers* was unnecessarily spiteful in his allusion to the Jew banker "Sidonia, a dirty little old man."

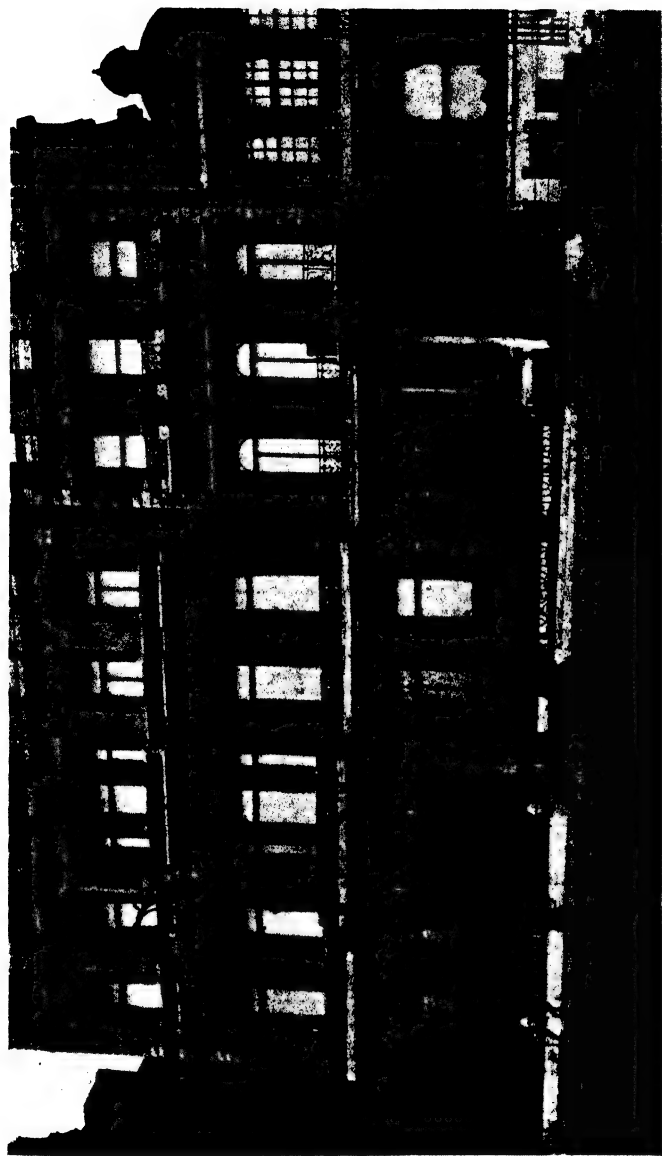
One great friend of the family's and regular visitor at Rothschild Row (already mentioned once or twice before in these pages) was Bernal Osborne, famous as a wit and a little unfortunate as a politician, who, though generally thought of as a typical Irish gentleman, was in fact the grandson of a former pillar of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in London. ("B.O.," he was generally called at the time; but in these degenerate days, it is perhaps advisable not to make use of this particular abbreviation.) Stories were told galore about his power of repartee; perhaps his best *mot* was his characterization of a certain arid politician of his day as a man who had no affections at all, except rheumatic ones. A good deal of a gourmet (a type which he defined as "one who prefers the woodcock's trail to the nightingale's song"), he had every reason to enjoy the Rothschild hospitality, and was frequently to be seen at their boards. There was one memorable occasion when he was dining with Sir Anthony—an exclusively masculine party, to meet a royal personage. His neighbour at table on that occasion was Sir Richard Middleton, who, like himself, was completely bald, but was so ashamed of the fact that he wore a neat toupé to conceal his affliction. During the dinner, one of the footmen, while passing a dish, caught a

sleeve-button in this and whisked it to the ground. He had the presence of mind to pick it up at once and replace it; only, seeing two identical bald heads before him, he unfortunately rammed it down, very much to Osborne's amusement, on the wrong one.<sup>1</sup>

Under Lionel's heir, the hospitality at 148 Piccadilly suffered no eclipse. Disraeli remained a frequent visitor, and Gladstone too, even in those days of confusion when he had espoused the cause of Home Rule and so many London houses were closed to him. Moreover, the younger generation knew one distinction to which their father could never have aspired: and Queen Victoria's eldest son, both as Prince of Wales and as King, was often seen as guest up and down Rothschild Row. In Edwardian London, the three brothers were among the most famous hosts of all. "There are no better parties, none more beautiful," recorded a man about town of the period, who experienced the eldest's hospitality on several occasions and met under his roof a galaxy of distinction.

Such magnificent hospitality was all the more commendable when it was altruistic. Even Rothschilds were not immune from digestive disorders. The reverse, indeed; and feasts which were only sybarite or gargantuan to their guests might be barmecide to the hosts. But vicarious thrills were still possible. A youthful guest at 148 Piccadilly during the first Lord Rothschild's régime might be surprised and flattered to be placed at the host's right hand, and would wonder why this place of

<sup>1</sup> A record of *mots* associated with Rothschild hospitality would fill a library. It was at the house which Nathan Mayer occupied in Paris, just before his death, that Talleyrand made his famous comparison of contemporary female costume with a winter's day, which begins too late and ends too soon.



"ROTHSCHILD ROW" (148 PICCADILLY TO THE LEFT)



honour had been given to him. But he would soon discover. In front of the master of the house there was placed a plate of biscuits and a tumbler of milk. When the fish was served—one of his chef's famous dishes—he asked his neighbour what it tasted like (possibly it was that marvellous recipe of the Parisian Rothschilds, which began by soaking a carp in brandy for three days). To describe a taste is not the easiest task; but the young man would do his best. "Ah, yes, I know exactly," said the noble host, at each sentence, taking a bite of biscuit and washing it down with a sip of the milk. Deprived himself of the joys of the table by a rigid diet, he took care to provide himself with an appreciative taster, and ate (as it were) by proxy.

Piccadilly hospitality was frequently the prelude, or successor, to less formal entertainment at New Court, where there would generally be a select party waiting for the Triumvirate for luncheon. For a financial magnate cannot eat and drink in public quite like other men. Sometimes, privacy may be desirable, if a business affair is to be discussed. But publicity may be annoying even when the engagement is purely social. If he wants to entertain an old school friend, just back from Timbuctoo, it may be highly inadvisable for them to go together to a club or restaurant. "There are . . . and . . ." the wiseacres of the City whisper to one another. "I suppose that the firm is angling for the new Timbuctoo issue." And they hurriedly leave the table, and in the afternoon there is an unaccountable fluctuation in Timbuctoo Four percents. There is one illuminating case in point, though it is associated with Gunnersbury, not New Court. At a party there, Sir Richard Jebb was introduced to Delane of *The Times*, with the

result that he became thereafter a regular contributor to its columns. From this episode sprang full-fledged the legend (which is not quite dead even now) that the Rothschilds had great newspaper interests and a controlling voice at Printing House Square!

So the private luncheon room at New Court was a necessity, not a luxury: and some of the most interesting characters of the period might be met there, to be regaled with a little cold chicken and a glass of hock or a cut off the famous Tring- or Gunnersbury-fed saddle of mutton. In the eighteen-seventies, there might be Sir Charles Rivers Wilson, fresh from Egypt: Henry Drummond Wolff, politician, diplomat and financier, son of Joseph Wolff the missionary and father of Lucas Cleeve the novelist, who joined with Gorst and Balfour and Churchill in constituting the Fourth Party in the eighteen-eighties: Sir William Henry Gregory, on leave from Ceylon, where he was Governor, but most valued at New Court for his astonishing knowledge and judgment in painting and ceramics: or, later on, Sir William Harcourt, Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons and one of the leaders in the attack on Cecil Rhodes and the Jameson Raiders. But there were many, many more. It was after all fair that the City, having provided the wherewithal to make the West End entertainments possible, should know, in the luncheon-room of New Court, a pale shadow at least of the sybarite delights of Rothschild Row.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE VALE OF AYLESBURY

NOT long after Nathan Mayer Rothschild's death, his widow purchased her sons (for a reason which will be indicated subsequently) a house and a small estate near Mentmore, in the Vale of Aylesbury. It was the centre of some of the best hunting country in Buckinghamshire, affording an opportunity for relaxation which was impossible in the semi-suburbanity of Gunnersbury. Slowly, one or the other of the three brothers added to this nucleus, purchasing his own estate and setting up his own house—a lead which was imitated in the following generation. Cousins subsequently followed this example, and in the end a good part of the surrounding countryside—perhaps as much as 30,000 acres all told—passed into the hands of one member or another of the Rothschild family.

It was Baron Mayer, the most bucolic of Nathan Rothschild's children, who set the example of becoming a squire to the rest. He fixed his seat at Mentmore itself, the ancient seat of the family of Bray, whose ancestor had been made a banneret on Bosworth Field. Gradually he added to the estates until they covered a considerable area, and his racing-stables and stud were housed luxuriously in the immediate vicinity. After his marriage, he built on the heights in the lovely buttercup Oxfordshire stone his new house, Mentmore Towers. It was designed in what was termed the Anglo-Norman



style, being modelled on Wollaton Hall, the famous home of the Willoughbys near Nottingham: though less expert visitors thought that it resembled nothing so much as a glorified Venetian villa. It was, however, constructed under the personal direction of Joseph Paxton (who had been responsible for the Crystal Palace, that crowning achievement of Victorian architecture) and commanded a magnificent view of the Vale of Aylesbury which no interior defects could obscure.

It was filled to overflowing with treasures, brought together with less regard to expense than to discrimination. The visitor entered into a grand hall, fifty feet long by forty wide, hung with priceless tapestries, and floored with parquet (then an unusual luxury) and Persian carpets. An open arcade ran round above, and the visitor looked down through arches into the hall, which was filled with gorgeous masses of flowers and every sumptuous object that wealth could command. From the great central hall hung with tapestries branched off lobbies filled with white marble: then three drawing-rooms, two (why two?) libraries, and a billiard-room—all crammed with precious articles in enamel, limoge, bronze, gold, silver, amber, jewels, and all manner of other things of beauty and especially of price. The house was a museum of everything—not least of furniture, all in marquetry, *pietra dura* or *vermeille*. "I don't believe," wrote Lady Eastlake, on whose description the above account is based, "that the Medici were ever so lodged in the height of their glory." Lord Crewe, who married the original owner's grand-daughter, paid a more delicate compliment in his *Life of Rosebery*: "Baron Mayer left an enduring monument in Mentmore and its village;

an amazing creation of a great house in a wide park and noble gardens, transmuted, as by the hand of a genie, from its first state of rolling pastures sloping up to the crest of a foothill of the Chilterns, and dotted with fattening bullocks."

Sir Anthony lived at Aston Clinton, under the beechwoods of the rising ground, just outside the Vale of Aylesbury. Here in 1853—the same year when Mentmore Towers was completed—he purchased a small house, formerly occupied by Lord Lake of Delhi. In the course of years, this too was greatly enlarged, and enlarged again, covering in the end a substantial piece of ground. But it was unpretentious to a degree, with its modest two stories and its simple exterior and its rambling plan and the splendidly wooded grounds in which it was set. It was furnished mainly in the French style, with as little regard to expense as Mentmore but with more discrimination: and to the end the mansion retained to a greater extent the character of the conventional English country-house, in keeping with the character of the minor Nimrod who owned it and his gracious wife. After his death, it was maintained by his widow and then by his two daughters, Lady Battersea and Mrs. Eliot Yorke, Mentmore passing on the other hand, on the death of Baron Mayer's daughter, into the possession of her husband, Lord Rosebery.

Baron Lionel pushed his conquests beyond the county borders. In 1873, he purchased the manor and estate of Tring, in Hertfordshire, adjoining the Buckinghamshire estates of the family, for nearly a quarter of a million pounds (exclusive of the furniture and pictures). The property extended over 3,643 acres. The mansion was a lovely seventeenth-century manor house designed by

Sir Christopher Wren, which had been presented by Charles II to Nell Gwynn. Here the former orange seller of Drury Lane had held her rollicking court: and her occupation was still recalled by the monogram, N.G., which was a prominent feature in the decoration.

It was historic ground:

Tring, Wing and Ivinghoe,  
Old Hampden did forego  
For striking the Black Prince a blow  
And glad that he escaped so.<sup>1</sup>

From this nucleus, Baron Lionel extended his purchases, so that he was able to leave a considerable property to each of his three sons. Nathaniel of course inherited Tring. He enlarged the old house very considerably after he entered into occupation; being careful, however (somewhat to the amusement of his friend Arthur Balfour) to have the new parts faced with old bricks, in order to please the aesthetes. The result was mildly incongruous, the general impression being neither old nor new—rather like a Piccadilly mansion conceived in the wrong material: and very little indeed of the seventeenth-century original remained visible to the eye. Only the glorious lawns in which it was set and the magnificent vistas through the Park, with the deer grazing peacefully under the beeches, could not be spoiled even by the hand of a Victorian architectural restorer.

The owner paid particular attention to the gardens and hot-houses, blazing the way for that

<sup>1</sup> The story went that Hampden quarrelled with the Black Prince while playing tennis, and atoned for his manners with his manors. It is a coincidence that of the three manors mentioned in the proverbial old quatrain, the only one with which the Rothschilds did not become associated was that which gave its name to Sir Walter Scott's famous novel of a medieval Jewess, *Ivanhoe*.

interest in natural science which was inherited and developed by his sons. By dint of inheritance and purchase, he became in the end one of the greatest landowners in that part of England, his estates—in the parishes of Aston Clinton, Aylesbury, Bierton, Hardwick, Weedon, Long Marston and several others<sup>1</sup>—extending over something more than 15,000 acres. After beginning his local public duties from the bottom, as a Lieutenant for many years in the Royal Bucks Yeomanry Cavalry, he ultimately reached the highest grade by serving as Lord Lieutenant and *custos rotulorum* of the County from 1889 to his death.

In addition to Tring, Baron Lionel had owned Halton, with its 1,400 acres, once the property of the Dashwood family. This, with its pretty village and glorious beech woods (to fall victims of the war of 1914–18) devolved on his death on Alfred, who constructed there (as we have seen) his very un-English mansion. Another property adjoining the family estates was a small seventeenth- or eighteenth-century manor-house near Wing, hard by Leighton Buzzard, where Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire meet, with a superb view over the Vale of Aylesbury as far as Mentmore Towers. This Baron Lionel gave not long before his death to his youngest son, Leopold,

<sup>1</sup> Long Marston had also a famous historical association, with one of the last and most notorious of all English witch-trials. It was here that Ruth Osborn and her husband were accused of sorcery in 1751. After a mob from the surrounding countryside had raged through the village, the "two superannuated wretches, crazed with age" (to borrow Gilbert White's phrase) were bound and dragged to their fate. The woman was drowned in the village pond, and the man died soon afterwards as the result of his immersion. Subsequently, to the general indignation of the local population, who were convinced that a righteous sentence had been carried into effect by the mob-justice, the ringleader was tried at Hertford and hanged. Eventually, the Vicar of Long Marston suppressed local resentment of this sentence by reading from the pulpit the condemned man's last statement, in which he recanted all belief in witchcraft.

who by degrees increased the estates, until he owned most of the property for a good distance round. At the same time, he added to the house, though it retained its simple, cottage-like character, in keeping with the unpretentious nature of its owner. This was the genesis of Ascott, Leighton Buzzard, spoken of as one of the most delightful country houses in England, with its fine English furniture and its great wide chimney-piece and its clipped yew hedges and its water-garden and rock-garden and its famous evergreen sundial, which was at one time or another graced by the presence of some of the most notable men in the kingdom and of many from beyond the seas.

In the neighbourhood, a few other Rothschilds found their homes, such as Baron Ferdinand, Lord Rothschild's cousin, brother-in-law and political successor, who in the 1870's built himself his incongruous French château on what was then a bleak height at Waddesdon (not to mention minor seats at Upper Winchenden and Leighton Buzzard); and his sister, Alice, with her seat at Eythrope Priory.

Thus by degrees the Vale of Aylesbury, with its centre at Tring and little salients out into the surrounding territory, became the Rothschild country *par excellence*. From 1865 to 1923, for fifty-eight years, a Rothschild represented the area in Parliament. (When Ferdinand died, the Hon. Walter Rothschild, Lord Rothschild's heir, took over from him, and represented the constituency until 1910, when he was succeeded by his cousin Lionel, Leopold's son.) Rothschild benefactions ameliorated living conditions in the villages, and inns called the Rothschild Arms dutifully adorned the High Street. Libraries and schools and clubs and

hospitals were dotted up and down the neighbourhood through the generosity of the family. Tring largely lived off Rothschild employment, Rothschild foundations, and Rothschild visitors. It would take a good-sized book to catalogue all the family benefactions to the neighbourhood. There were few, even of the old county families, whose territorial influence in one particular area was so strong, so extensive and (let it be added) so completely identified with the traditions of the soil.

Though when they first arrived in Buckinghamshire the new-comers were suspected of an attempt to dechristianize the district, and though once or twice Jewish services were held at Tring Park (mention has been made of one example in 1881, when the youth who was to be the second Lord Rothschild entered upon his religious majority, and his Uncle Leopold, married the previous Monday, walked over from Ascott to attend the ceremony), the family never failed to do a good deal more than their duty to all the Christian denominations in the neighbourhood. The Bishop of Oxford stayed with Sir Anthony, complete with chaplain and coachman, when he was confirming in the vicinity. All over the Vale of Aylesbury there were traces of their religious impartiality. Here the old Church was restored at the expense of one or the other of the family, here a new organ was installed, here a site was given for a new Nonconformist chapel. Shortly after the death of a congregant who used to defray the salary of his curate, the Vicar of a parish near Leighton Buzzard met Leopold out riding. "Vicar," said the benign-looking Jewish gentleman, reining in his horse, "I hear poor Charlie used to give you £100 a year to help you to maintain your Church

services. I should be sorry to see them suffer through his death. Be pleased to accept the same from me." And this was by no means an isolated instance.

In 1910, Lord Rothschild extended to the country the experiment in practical philanthropy which he had applied with so much success in London. The Tring District Council was anxious to put into operation the provisions of the recent Housing and Town Planning Act. Even before this had been placed upon the Statute Book, the condition of many of the cottages at Tring had occupied the serious consideration of the Council. To cut negotiations short, Lord Rothschild gave instructions for the erection of fifty model cottages, to provide accommodation at a suitable rental for those whose homes might be condemned. In addition, so as to prevent any of the small owners from being hard hit, he expressed his willingness to buy the condemned properties in deserving cases at a fair valuation, compensation being paid on terms to be settled by some independent authority. The offer was said at the time to be absolutely unexampled in local public life.

The difficult business of being country gentlemen (not quite so spontaneous as that of being a grandfather) was studied by the Rothschilds wholeheartedly. All the family, except perhaps Alfred, loved the country—the natural reaction from the centuries of cooping-up in the ghetto, the result of which is to-day being seen in a reversion by Jews throughout the world to agricultural interests. The beautiful pleasure grounds, the teaming coverts, the well-filled nurseries, and the proximity to the famous museum and menageries, made Tring Park above all a place of intense interest as well as of



THE MANSION, TRING PARK  
(From the Lawns)





beauty. The stables and kennels on all the Rothschild estates were as luxurious, and were constructed with as little eye to economy, as the mansions themselves. There can be little doubt that to be a Rothschild horse or dog was considered among more plebeian quadrupeds an enviable distinction. It was a standing joke that the cattle at Tring Park stood in oaken stalls and fed off silver mangers.

The farms on his demesne had under Lord Rothschild a particularly high reputation for the excellence of the general management. But it was in the breeding of pure-bred stock that the estate achieved the greatest distinction. To describe fully its achievements in stock-breeding would be to write a history of the breeds of Shire horses, Dairy Shorthorn and Jersey cattle, and Hampshire Down sheep, as well as of poultry keeping and dairying, in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. It would be difficult to say in which of these breeds and pursuits the highest success was attained, for the same high standard of efficiency was maintained in every department. Tring Park was looked upon—and with abundant justification—as a centre in agricultural activity which afforded an example to the whole country: and the Tring Agricultural Show, established in 1841, became one of the greatest events in the vicinity. Finance, it seems, can be the hand-maiden of agriculture, even as its lofty kinswoman is of industry; while stock-broking and stock-breeding may walk hand in hand.

“Even if a Jew tells you that he likes blood-sports,” once said Walter Rathenau, “do not believe him. If he says so, he lies.” He was speaking from limited, or personal, experience: for no amount of pretence or self-deception could ever

have attuned the Rothschilds of the second and third generation so completely to the prevailing spirit of the English countryside: "It's a fine day: let's go out and kill something." Old Mrs. Nathan was primarily responsible, in the first instance. Unlike her husband, she was English-born, and anglicized in her tastes: and, when she imagined that her sons were too much engrossed in their affairs in the City, she urged them to take a day's exercise every week. Before the apotheosis of golf, this meant, even when the meekest of mortals was in question, a day's hunting, and it was for this reason that she first acquired the nucleus of the estate at Mentmore. Nathan Mayer, while he lived, did nothing to stop what his wife encouraged: and when Lionel left England to get married, his face still bore the traces of a severe tumble which he had experienced not long before while following the King's Stag.

Lionel and his brothers had begun by following generally the Old Berkeley pack. But fox-hunting was a little precarious, as there was so often a blank day. Accordingly, they started their own stag-hunt, later famous throughout the county, with its kennels at Mentmore. It was entirely financed by the Rothschilds, regularly met on Mondays and Thursdays and in the course of time became vastly popular in the Vale of Aylesbury. Subsequently, the Hunt was taken over by the new generation, Lord Rothschild and his brother Leopold (reinforced subsequently by the former's eldest son) acting alternately as Master.

The pack was kept up in princely style, the huntsmen and whippers-in being splendidly mounted. The Tring stables housed magnificent hunters, and the deer were preserved under conditions that

ensured a good run at each meet, when crowds of hard-riding visitors came long distances to rustle over a fine grass country. Natty and Leopold at least were good horsemen, and used to ride to the hounds with enthusiasm until comparatively late in their lives.

The other conventional country sports were followed with equal relish—especially by Sir Anthony, who enjoyed nothing so much as an occasional massacre of pheasants, and made a point of inviting the scions of the aristocracy for a few days' shooting. (Lord Randolph Churchill once shocked him by preferring to remain indoors while the rest of the party were enjoying healthy exercise by blowing innocent birds to pieces.) It was while hunting with him that the Prince of Wales received the news of the death of the Emperor Napoleon III. But, in the new generation, Alfred made up for his uncle; and his exaggerated timorousness when he had to organize a shoot, as indicated above, verged on the ludicrous.

The hospitality which began in Piccadilly became more intimate in the Vale of Aylesbury: not at mere week-ends, in the vulgar modern sense, but in those more protracted house-parties which generally occupied the inside of a week and broke up on Saturday mornings. In the earlier generation, Sir Anthony would entertain at Aston Clinton the world and his wife—Bishop Wilberforce, Gladstone, Browning, Tennyson, Dean Stanley, Lord Lyndhurst, the great Viceroy Minto, and of course the admiring Disraeli, to mention only a few names chosen at random. Matthew Arnold was a semi-perpetual inmate, the lady of the house being his most regular correspondent. More august visitors were not rare. Mention has already been made of

the future Edward VII: and even the Tsarevitch was there once in 1874, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, before Russia had disgraced herself by a renewal of religious persecution, and made himself memorable in the annals of the locality by regaling the village maidens on his host's *pâté de foie gras*.

At Mentmore Towers, Baron Mayer and his wife kept lavish hospitality. Occasional guests included Lady Dorothy Neville, Thackeray, Matthew Arnold, Lord Houghton, and Whyte-Melville, the classical writer on all field-sports, who died from a hunting accident and who was inspired at Mentmore to write his once-famous poem, "The Stag." At the house-parties Delane of *The Times* might quarrel with Charles Villiers the politician or Sir Richard Quain the physician (who waited at the Queen's special request on Disraeli in his last illness) or Lady Eastlake the blue-stocking or Robert Lowe, Chancellor of the Exchequer under Gladstone and the most trenchant critic of the Rothschilds' most spectacular financial transaction. The last-named was indeed considered more stimulating than agreeable as company:

Here lie the bones of Robert Lowe,  
Where he's gone to, I don't know.  
If to the realm of peace and love,  
Farewell to happiness above:  
If he's gone to a lower level,  
I can't congratulate the Devil.

In the days of the Triumvirate, there would be distinguished gatherings of City men and statesmen (by no means only of one political complexion, though later on Unionists predominated) at Tring

Park, with less formal house-parties with golf and bridge at Ascott (where Balfour was a regular, and Asquith an occasional, guest) and sumptuous gatherings at Halton graced by famous operatic stars. Here, at the Christmas of 1896, a visitor recorded that eight nationalities were represented in the house-party, including the ministers of Belgium and Brazil: but this was by no means exceptional. Only once was there any recorded shadow of discord—in 1888, when Gladstone was taken over to see the treasures while staying in the neighbourhood and found the master of the house absent, whether from political or other reasons. A complete list of the visitors at the various mansions during the sixty years when the Rothschilds were supreme in the Vale of Aylesbury would resemble a condensed version of *Who's Who*: and there can be little point in attempting to compile it.

There were only two flies—and very small ones at that—to spoil the ointment of those who were entertained at Tring. (Haldane indeed might have added a third, as one day he was left to come up from the station in the luggage-cart: but, since he was a regular week-ender, and had a room reserved for him at all times, he could hardly take this as a personal affront.) One was that, though the breakfast menu was so remarkably varied, bacon and eggs did not figure on it, and was not even served in the house. The other peculiarity was also put down—with less justice—to the host's Jewish background. After dinner, the men guests never joined the ladies in the drawing-room: instead, at about ten o'clock the ladies were taken to the smoking-room to join the men, where they remained till midnight. It was a curious breach with conventional practice, and persons could only assume that

their host looked down on women as the inferior sex. But clearly this was not the case. No descendant of Gudule Rothschild of Frankfort, or nephew of Lady de Rothschild of Aston Clinton, could conceivably despise women, even though he might have contested the advisability of their being given the Vote. In any case, notwithstanding these peculiarities, most visitors were willing to repeat the experiment—if they had the chance—again and again.

## CHAPTER XII

### BARON MAECENAS

THE earliest Rothschild who emerges full-face to the light of history, Mayer Amschel of Frankfort, was a dealer in rare coins and medals. It was due to this that he obtained that connexion with the Elector of Hesse-Cassel which was the foundation of the family fortunes. Now, this interest in antique coins might logically have developed in one of two directions. It might have concentrated on the antiquarian side, and grown into an absorption in matters archaic and artistic; or it might have concentrated on the lucre, and developed into an interest in finance. As it happens—mainly owing to the special circumstances that prevailed at the close of the eighteenth century—the latter tendency won the day. But the former remained latent. It was superfluous before long for it to be indulged in with commercial objects in view. It found its expression therefore in the fact that in the course of the nineteenth century the Rothschilds became perhaps the most magnificent family of collectors that Europe had known since the Renaissance.

Not that there were no exceptions among them, in the first generation at least. Nathan Mayer Rothschild, in England, was so preoccupied with the urgent necessity of making a living, from his 'teens upwards, that when he was able to afford it he had lost interest in such amenities of life. The story was told how the then Chief Rabbi, Solomon



Hirschel, gave a letter of recommendation for New Court to a certain Jewish dealer who had a few paintings to dispose of. The cheapest was priced at £300. Rothschild was aghast. "What, £300! I cannot afford to spend so much on pictures. I must buy ponies for my boys, and such-like things, which are either useful or profitable, but I cannot throw away money on paintings." The other's face fell; he too had boys, though he did not require ponies for them. The banker recalled that they had met before, at the Jewish eating-house in Manchester which he had frequented when he first came over to England: he relented to the extent of ten per cent. "As the Rabbi has recommended you to me," he said, "I will buy a thirty-pound picture from you. I don't care what sort of thing it is; choose one yourself from your collection and let me have it."

There was another occasion when Audubon, the famous American ornithologist, waited on the great man with a prospectus of his *magnum opus*, *The Birds of America*. Rothschild was mildly interested, until he heard the price at which it was proposed to publish the work—£200. "£5 is more like it," he cried, scandalized. And he once told Spohr, that he knew nothing of music. "This is the music for me," he added, jingling the coins in his pocket. But notwithstanding this, he showed subsequently that his bluntness was something of a pose by taking a box for the violinist's next concert. He would have appreciated, nevertheless, the remark made by one of his kinsmen who mentioned to a friend that a certain member of the family composed music. "But not from necessity, thank God," he hastened to add.

In spite of this unpropitious beginning, the

Rothschilds of succeeding generations, both in England and abroad, brought up in more favourable circumstances, had the widest possible intellectual and artistic interests and made themselves famous thereby all over the world. A French Rothschild became one of the Forty Immortals. There was a Rothschild who wrote plays, a Rothschild who edited Rousseau and a Rothschild (the same one, in fact) who was an expert in children's medicine and welfare. A Rothschild was an authority on the Mystery Plays of the Old Testament and a Rothschild compiled the history of the Post. Several Rothschilds wrote travel sketches and historical essays. A Rothschild has explored Abyssinia (sent there by his family, the malicious said, to get him out of reach of the costly embraces of Parisian beauties), and left an account of his travels: more than one Rothschild has tried his hand, discreetly, on a novel. In the annals of botany and zoology, Rothschilds have achieved real eminence. A Rothschild of the youngest generation, in our own day, has built up in a few years one of the most remarkable private libraries of modern English literature in existence in private hands. From the purely intellectual point of view, it is not easy to think of many families who have excelled in so many generations, and in so many directions.

It is of course easy to sneer at all this, as the pseudepigraphal achievement of men to whom expense counted for nothing, and who could always be assured of being able to hire the best brains to do the work for which they took themselves the credit. But it is a cheap sneer. Even if it were in every case well-founded, the putative authors would still deserve recognition for having

had the interest, and for trying to use their opulence for the forwarding of knowledge. It should not be forgotten that the guiding spirit behind the formation of a great collection, or the foundation of an important museum, performs a function which is far from negligible. A man like Antonio Panizzi, for example, creator of the book-collection of the British Museum as we know it to-day, deservedly receives honour for a great achievement, even though he may have been responsible for nothing whatsoever of the work of detail. It seems a little unfair that a wealthy man should be deprived of similar credit, simply because he provides the funds as well as the inspiration.

It was said long ago that Rothschild in-breeding was responsible for the transmission of their financial flair to the third and fourth generation. It is as logical to suppose that it was responsible also for the development of a certain standard of intellectual interest and aesthetic appreciation, which perhaps persisted even after the more notorious quality began to wane. There was concentrated sometimes in the offspring of these marriages between cousins the accumulated passion for certain lines of inquiry and certain branches of expertise, heightened by the invigorating and cultured atmosphere in which they were brought up from youth. In those interests above all which reappear generation after generation, it is more reasonable to seek the influence of heredity than a slavish pursuit of fashion.

Above all, before the nineteenth century had advanced very far, the family's innate artistic taste had time to develop. All over Europe, Rothschilds made themselves famous by their patronage of art in every form. In Germany, Austria, and France,

as well as in England, they were the great collectors —of paintings, of goldsmiths' work, of china, of engravings, of books, of furniture, of manuscripts, and, as time went on, of less fashionable objects. The public museums and galleries of Paris, Vienna and London are replete with their gifts. Baron Alphonse in Paris (brother-in-law of the three English magnificos) assembled priceless enamels and goldsmithery of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance period—the Salle Rothschild at the Louvre now contains his collection, which he bequeathed to the French nation. Baron Edmond, his brother, was outstanding as an expert in engravings above all. Every public collection in Paris profited from the fact, and, again at the Louvre, a tablet records his name and benefactions. Baron Willy, of Frankfort, was pre-eminently interested in books, his collection going to enrich (if it still does) the Frankfort Stadtbibliothek; while his brother Mayer founded a very important independent library in the same city. Speaking of the English branch above all, a member of a family which has produced a Cardinal, and is not necessarily biased, therefore, in a favourable direction, has set down his considered opinion: "Of all people I give the palm to the cultured Jew, and of all cultured Jews to the Rothschilds in particular. Whether it is enamel or stones, horses or carts, flowers, cigars, pictures, music or anything you like, they know all there is to know, but they are always ready to listen. This must, I think, be the reason for their greatness."<sup>1</sup>

Hence the position that the three magnificos occupied in the realm of art and of art-dealers was unique. Luncheon hour at New Court was a

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Bainbridge, *Twice Seven* (1933).

sort of royal levee, with the magnates of the world of art foremost among the courtiers. Shortly after noon the hall became filled with dealers and merchants from all parts of Europe, all hoping that they would catch the eye of one of the Triumvirate as he came out of the office. And generally there was business doing. Every day, each of the three was almost sure to stop to pass the time of day with one of the anxious group. "What have you to show me?" he would say: and, if an affair resulted, it was seldom of negligible magnitude. The three financiers went into lunch, leaving three men happy.

A number of the dealers from whom the Rothschild family made their acquisitions were also Jews, who had followed the parallel track from the enforced ghetto callings, which led to antiquarianism instead of high finance. Several maintained themselves almost entirely by keeping on the lookout for objects of special importance for one member or another of the House. Hence a whole satellite school of Jewish art dealers came into existence, whose chief customers they were. There was for example Friedrich Spitzer, son of the communal grave-digger at Pressburg, whose collection of armour is now the property of the English Crown; Asher Wertheimer, himself a distinguished benefactor of public galleries; the Goldschmidts, the Davises, and above all the Duveens, themselves the founders of a notable dynasty and responsible for many princely benefactions.

Of the earlier English triumvirate, it was Baron Lionel whose taste was finest and whose artistic interests were most pronounced. His brother Mayer indeed purchased lavishly. His collection

of limoge enamels was pre-eminent; he brought home from Italy some of the finest Italian Renaissance furniture in England: and he had, too, exquisite French specimens, some made for Marie Antoinette and bearing her cypher. But there was little discrimination in his method, and his residences—until another hand had introduced order into them—must have seemed distressingly like an auction room on the eve of a great sale (or, as some one described his French cousins' famous château at Ferrières, like a chest of drawers that had been knocked over). His eldest brother on the other hand was more moderate and more balanced in this, as in all things. He purchased widely but wisely; and his mansion in Piccadilly was designed with a view to housing his accumulated treasures, a great part of which descended after him to his eldest son (who, of course, added to the collection) and remained undisturbed until the mansion and its contents were disposed of in 1937.

In the ballroom (they were subsequently degraded to the half-landing) there hung a remarkable treasure—three splendid Gobelin tapestries woven with scenes from Ovid, the principal one depicting Daphne changing into a laurel tree, just as Apollo clasps her in his arms. These were made for Vincent Hotman, Seigneur de Fonteney, of the seventeenth century, whose arms they bore. Gobelin portières, too, were a feature of the gallery connecting the east and west drawing-rooms. In the ballroom stood also what was considered the *pièce de résistance* of the collection of furniture—a superb *secrétaire à abattant* of tulip-wood by Martin Carlin, the cabinet-maker to Louis XIV, who made much of the furniture at St. Cloud, further embellished by Sèvres porcelain panels believed to be the

work of Commelin (when the Rothschild collection was dispersed, this magnificent trifle fetched £8,000). Then there was the famous Ceres Table in the manner of André Charles Boulle, with its top of tortoise-shell inlaid with an intricate design in mother-of-pearl, gilt metal, and lapis lazuli after Jean Berain. Other pieces of furniture represented the art of Dubois, Carel, Roussel and the other great French *ébénistes* of the eighteenth century, at its finest. There was superb glass, porcelain, faience, and cloisonné; carvings in wood, ivory, jade and rock-crystal: engravings by Dürer, Lucas van Leyden, Rembrandt and other early masters: and all the other decorative magnificences which ordinary mortals can see only in museums. A precious trifle which reflected the owner's ancestral allegiances was a remarkable extra-illustrated Bible, extended to fourteen volumes by the insertion of many hundreds of engravings and etchings, themselves sometimes of very high value.

The pictures included some of the finest which had come into the market in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the collection being strongest in the Dutch and Flemish masters of the seventeenth century. They included a Dutch courtyard by that fine painter, Pieter de Hooch; the *Fish Seller*, by Gabriel Metsu (formerly in the collection of William Beckford, and acquired by Baron Lionel at the Higginson sale of 1846—one of three canvases by that artist); and a superlative production by that rare master, Egmont van der Neer, also from the Fonthill Collection. There were also—later acquisitions—some matchless Gainsboroughs and lovely Murillos, the latter including *The Good Shepherd*, one of the artist's most famous works.

Under the first Lord Rothschild, the family collection received an important addition which made it pre-eminent in another direction. Baron Mayer Karl von Rothschild of Frankfort, his father-in-law, had specialized in Continental silver; and his collection, catalogued by Luthmer, was used very largely by Rosenberg in compiling the standard work on silversmiths' marks. When in 1886 the Baron died, his treasures were divided among his five surviving daughters. (He would have left the collection to the City of Frankfort, it was said, but for the fact that the quiet and cleanliness of his mansion were spoiled for him by the erection outside it, without any apparent object except to annoy him, of a device for weighing coal-carts.) The paltry fifth share which came to England was in itself a very remarkable collection indeed. There was the Augsburg Diana by Jacob Miller the Elder, the equally famous Brieg Cup by an unknown craftsman of Breslau, and the celebrated Ostrich-egg cup made by Elias Geier of Leipzig in 1589. The Nuremberg section included many famous pieces, among them being the great Pineapple Cup and the Löffholtz Cup, both attributed to Hans Keller; the Nuremberg Elephant by Christoff Ritter; the Lencker *Tazza*: and—certainly the most important of all—the renowned Christoph Jamnitzer Globe, one of the finest examples of the work of one of the great master-craftsmen of his age. Holland contributed the Adam van Vianen Salt and the better-known Neptune Salt by his kinsman Christian van Vianen (a master-goldsmith who sought his fortune in England and wrought some vessels for Charles I, for St. George's Chapel, Windsor, which were melted down in the Civil War). Swiss was a great terrestrial globe of parcel



gilt supported by Atlas, by Abraham Gessner of Zurich. The collection comprised, too, one great English object, an Elizabethan coco-nut cup mounted in silver-gilt, with the London hall-mark of 1577-8—perhaps the most splendid specimen of its kind in existence. This collection alone (further developed by Nathaniel) made 148 Piccadilly in his day one of the great private museums of London.

Leopold too had a remarkable collection of silver; Jones's *Catalogue of the Old Plate of Leopold de Rothschild* is an invaluable work of reference and a monument to his taste. Two objects stood out above the rest, and he never tired of showing them. One was Cellini's *Four Seasons*. The other was a silver partridge, accurate in every detail and instinct with action—as though the bird had been suddenly stopped and been translated into precious metal.

These tastes of the English Rothschilds were shared by their brother-in-law, Evelina's husband, who (as we have seen) became an Englishman. Freiherr Anselm, of Vienna, had distinguished in his will between the tastes of his son Ferdinand, like himself a patron of the arts, and Albert, interested mainly in business matters. In England, the former gave vent to his inclinations unrestrained. He was a discriminating collector, a trustee of the British Museum (a particularly happy appointment made at the special request of his royal friend, the Prince of Wales), and author of a book on French history, as well as of a discreetly-veiled German novel. Waddesdon, his shimmering house in Buckinghamshire, was designed with a special view to displaying his collections. There were masterpieces of painting and

sculpture, timepieces, cabinets, Italian cassoni, old furniture, tapestries, cameos, boxes, porcelain, carvings, armour, illuminated manuscripts, bindings in astounding profusion. The collection was especially strong in medieval and Renaissance art, in which it was at the time the finest in England, in private or in public hands. But every other branch was represented. The Shah of Persia, when he stayed at Waddesdon, was captivated by a bureau clock made for Louis XIV. The paintings included Joshua Reynolds' *Mrs. Sheridan as St. Cecilia*—perhaps his finest work—his *Thais* and his *Mrs. Scott of Danesfield*. Gainsborough was also represented, and Romney as well, by magnificent canvases.

It had long been an open secret that the great collection of medieval and Renaissance art—valued at over £100,000 (some mentioned three times that sum)—would be bequeathed on his death to the British Museum. Knowing this, the authorities had sometimes referred to him the owners of treasures which they could not afford to buy, as a devious way of acquiring them for the Nation. (It was thus, for example, that Ferdy obtained his famous set of litter-handles, perhaps the most glorious item of all the treasures he possessed.) The expectations which had been set on his generosity were not disappointed. It was his tribute of gratitude to the land which had given him hospitality, a bride, and short-lived happiness. It was perhaps the most munificent donation that the Museum had ever received, and, under the title "The Waddesdon Bequest" is still kept separately at Bloomsbury and constitutes the most delightful section of all in that Brobdingnagian Aladdin's Cave.

Whereas other members of the family were patrons of art, Alfred was a connoisseur of really high rank. Lady Dorothy Neville said that he was the finest amateur judge in England of French eighteenth-century art: and there is no doubt that she was correct. His interests did not, however, stop at paintings. His collection (to quote Lady Dorothy again) was a monument of what sound judgment and unrivalled taste can effect. His Sèvres china was unique. When another wealthy man felt inclined to make a present to Lord Kitchener, he no doubt thought in terms of horses; only Alfred de Rothschild could have had the inspiration of presenting him with a parade-set of ornate saddle steels, made for Philip III of Spain.

Alfred had studied painting and music fairly seriously in his younger days, and was justly looked upon as the expert even in that particularly well-informed family. His collection of paintings was built up methodically—largely with the assistance of Charles Davis, the great art dealer of the day and for years his constant companion. It was particularly rich in Dutch masters of the seventeenth century and English and French of the eighteenth. The house at Seamore Place was a veritable picture-gallery. The walls were adorned by four glorious full-lengths by Gainsborough, including his famous *Mrs. Tickell*, now in the Dulwich Gallery (Lord Rothschild on the other hand owned the same painter's, *Mrs. Sheridan*, and Baron Ferdinand his *Pink Boy*). Romney was represented by the chief treasure of all, *Lady Hamilton in a Black Hat*; Reynolds by his *Mrs. Bampfylde*. There were half a dozen glorious Teniers (including his *Card Party*), Holbein's *Ambassadors*, Velasquez's *Admiral Pulido Pareja*, and Moroni's *Noblemen* (the

last three all from the Longford Castle Collection): four masquerades by Longhi: numerous Greuzes, of whom the owner was a particular admirer: and many other priceless treasures, too numerous to be specified, including Canova's *Dancing Girl*, a rhapsody in marble.

At Halton there were his Cuyyps, his Hobbemas and above all his French pictures—Watteaus, Lancrets, Paters and Bouchers—barely surpassed in England even by those in the Wallace collection, nowhere outside it, and in very few galleries abroad. The furniture was on almost an equally high level. There were superb specimens of English work of the period of the greatest paintings, tables by Riesener and Gouthière, and magnificent commodes. Of the goldsmithery, the outstanding specimen was the glorious Pichon enamelled Orpheus Cup in gold, of the fourteenth century, now in the British Museum. When it was disposed of by auction in 1925, though to some extent depleted by the generous gifts he had made by his will, the collection realized a total price of £175,000.

It was natural for a man of such means, and such taste, to be made one of the Trustees of the National Gallery, as well as of the Wallace Collection (which he enriched with magnificent candelabra, in keeping with the general decorations). He took his duties very seriously indeed, showing a deep personal interest in every single acquisition, and more than once supplementing out of his own pocket the meagre Government grants so as to prevent important chances from being lost. But he was as anxious, as meticulous and as cautious in this as he was in his private life. When the National Gallery purchased a Franz Hals from Lord Talbot, he was in an agony of apprehension

lest the public should say that he was a party to paying more for a picture for the nation than he would have been willing to pay himself, and could not bring himself to permit any official announcement to be made. Pressmen who wanted information had to call again and again. Finally, a draft statement was prepared, which had to be gone over line by line by his solicitor: and when finally it was released, it was expressly stipulated that it was not to go in a prominent page, nor to be in big type, nor to be made a feature of in any way.<sup>1</sup>

One might have expected a man like Alfred de Rothschild to be especially attracted to the great Italian masters of the Renaissance, with their glorious colouring and unsurpassed decorative value. But—perhaps because of their essentially religious and necessarily Christian character—this was not the case, and they did not figure in his collections. More explicably, he had no taste at all for the moderns, which would have seemed particularly out of place in the rococo setting of his home. Sargent's great portrait of his kinswoman, Lady Sassoon, he considered a caricature. One of the most delightful sketches of Max Beerbohm (who as early as 1895 had devoted his talents to him in that long-defunct and now untraceable periodical, *Pick-me-up*) shows the Curator of the Tate Gallery, D. S. MacColl, trying to explain to Mr. Alfred de Rothschild the spiritual significance of a new acquisition, *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue*, by a co-religionist of his, Will Rothenstein.

The alternative to an interest in old masters on the part of the aristocracy and plutocracy is popularly supposed to be young mistresses. Contemporary art, however, is sometimes patronized

<sup>1</sup> The story is told in detail by J. H. Richardson, *From the City to Fleet Street* (1927).

(though rarely) even by millionaires. Millais exhibited in 1874 a portrait of Lionel Walter Rothschild, Nathaniel's eldest son, in a black velvet dress with a red sash. (Those who remember the somewhat elephantine appearance of the second Lord Rothschild only towards the close of his life will think the costume a little incongruous.) The critics were enthusiastic about the background. "The painting of a large sofa behind the figure is superbly rich and soft," one of them wrote, "and could hardly be improved." Leopold and Alfred—especially the former—were among the most liberal and most discerning customers of Fabergé, the Russian Court Jeweller, in whom the art of silversmith and enameller reached a height of perfection hardly equalled since the sixteenth century. Not only did they themselves patronize him munificently, but they made their tastes so well known that others in turn who wished to make them a present went to the same source. There was one occasion when, in order to satisfy all these calls, Fabergé made an entire supply of the more commonplace objects in the Rothschild colours of dark blue and yellow, in order to have them on hand when there was the usual run, generally about the time of Ascot or Newmarket or the Derby. It was an admirable business deal, but otherwise a little disappointing, as "Mr. Leopold" himself insisted on buying the lot.

Collecting is essentially, by its very nature, the occupation of an amateur. In the next generation, the English Rothschilds progressed beyond this. It is interesting to watch the development of interest in natural science in its successive periods. Baron Lionel had loved flowers as well as pictures, and had delighted to surround himself with the

most magnificent specimens of both. His eldest son approached the subject more methodically, combined with his love of horticulture a considerable interest in botany, and made the nurseries and hot-houses at Tring famous. His children in turn became devotees of natural science, and the elder in particular—Lionel Walter, subsequently the second Lord Rothschild—made a name which would perhaps have become more widely known still were it not for the fact that the world persisted in thinking of a Rothschild primarily as a banker.

The specialization began in an extremely commonplace fashion, when, at the usual age, he began to collect butterflies. But, instead of discarding this hobby with adolescence, it grew on him and extended. When he went up to Cambridge, in the steps of his father and uncles, he made the acquaintance of Professor Alfred Newton, one of the great authorities on Natural History of his day, who assisted to direct his taste for research. This was further developed at Bonn, where he continued his studies in thorough-going German style.

In 1889, his father let him have a cottage in the corner of the estate at Tring in order to house the insect collection, which by now had become quite important. This formed the nucleus of the famous Tring Zoological Museum, which ultimately consisted of a large building and annexe, standing on a site of three acres, covering over half an acre of ground with three times as much floor-space, and housing the finest private collection of its sort in the world. The total cost, by the time of the owner's death in 1937, was calculated to have exceeded half a million pounds.

The scope of the contents was enormous.

There were insects, mammals, birds, fishes and reptiles, all mounted in buildings specially designed to house them. In order to make the collection really satisfactory for scientific purposes, the owner considered it necessary to accumulate, not merely specimens of a creature from every place where it was known to exist, but, in addition to this, more than one specimen of each individual kind. Special exhibits traced the development of species, including moreover examples of extinct animals or those which were nearing extinction. There was an exceptional collection of horns from all over the world. A not unimportant menagerie was annexed—very different in scope and intention from Uncle Alfred's circus at Halton! It was a standing joke in the family that once Lord Rothschild, entering New Court, found his way blocked by a couple of bear-cubs in the charge of a somewhat inarticulate keeper, who had come to interview his son and heir with a view to business.

An outstanding section of the collection, consisting of over a quarter of a million items, was devoted to birds. This was particularly rich in "type specimens": that is to say, the actual specimens which had been selected and registered by research workers in defining the species to which they belong—objects which have a high monetary as well as scientific value. In 1932, however, this section was sold to the New York Museum of Natural History. It was a great blow for the owner. But the burden of maintaining the collection had become too great for his reduced means, and the choice lay between disposing of this or of the even more complete collection of insects.

This was the greatest glory of the Museum—above all the butterflies and moths, totalling more



than 2,000,000, and including vast numbers of type-specimens, numerous species to be found in no other museum, and some still undescribed. Pride of place should be given to a huge "bird-wing" butterfly, with gorgeous green and black markings, which was caught in the Aru Islands, New Guinea, in the course of a scientific expedition financed by the owner, and known after him as the *ornithoptera Rothschildi*—by no means the only creature which zoologists linked up with his name (there was also for example the *Rhea Rothschildi*, a variety of nandu or South American ostrich). There were less noble specimens from the insect world, too. On the occasion of Shackleton's Antarctic expedition in 1907, Walter Rothschild wrote him an urgent letter imploring him to send back some specimens of penguins' fleas—a request which was nearly unanswered, as the application was blown away in a blizzard, though afterwards recovered. About the collection of fleas, the public used, of course, to wax ribald. It was said that one of them cost the owner £10,000, and was discovered on investigation to have escaped from New Court.

The Museum was not only a rich man's collection. It was also a centre of research. Many were the expeditions into little-known parts of the globe which were financed (and in former days often accompanied) by the founder in order to collect fresh specimens. He issued from it too a regular periodical, *Novitates Zoologicae*, which held a high place in the literature of zoology, on which he published in addition several important monographs. There were certain branches of natural science in which he contributed perhaps more to knowledge than any other scholar of his time.

Such absorption in scientific interests is not perhaps compatible with a banking career: and, indeed, the time came when the heir to the barony had to choose between the two. He had been taken into the business at New Court as a matter of course. But the conservative methods of the firm did not appeal to him, for his collection was by now becoming a terribly expensive luxury. There came a time when he made some speculations on a very large scale, which turned out unfortunately. It was not the sort of thing that his father would appreciate, and another way out of the trouble had to be found. In order to balance his accounts, he raised (it is said) a large sum on the security of his expectations, and insured his father's life for £200,000 so as to be certain to be able to repay when the time came. But one thing upset his plan. Large commitments of that sort are often divided by insurance companies with one another, so as to minimize the prospective risk. One day, Lord Rothschild was paying his customary weekly visit to the Alliance Assurance Company, which had been founded by his grandfather and of which he was himself—as it were by hereditary right—Chairman. According to his usual practice, he asked to be shown a list of the major risks contracted during the week. To his amazement, at the head of it stood an insurance policy on his own life, taken out by his own son. The truth of the entire affair came out: and from that time, the heir to the title ceased to take any part in the work at New Court.

It may be asked what is the point in devoting so much space to a rich man's hobby. There are three reasons. In the first place, there is a certain fascination in seeing how great intellectual ability

can persist in spite of great wealth: and there is perhaps, in times like the present, a certain degree of importance in seeing how great wealth can justify itself. In the second place, the collection was never used selfishly. It added to the sum of knowledge, and it was in addition thrown open not only to students but also to the public, of whom as many as 15,000 visited it each year. And finally, however much it may have been created to satisfy the private whim and tastes of the owner, after his death it devolved by his will on the public, being left in its entirety to the British Museum, in order to be made use of for the purpose of zoological research. It is now national property, and the circumstances in which it was created are certainly of more than genealogical interest.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DUKE'S PLACE

WHEN Nathan Mayer Rothschild came over to England from Frankfort during the Napoleonic Wars, he was too busily engaged in other matters to take a very great interest in the affairs of the Synagogue. In an age of formal orthodoxy, he was, of course, formally orthodox: and his banking house was closed on Saturday, on which day no drafts drawn upon it were payable—a tradition which has continued to the present time. When he got on in life and in the world, he interested himself—as he could hardly have refrained from doing—in the burning question of Jewish Emancipation. In ordinary synagogal business, however, he did not play any great part; and if he occupied an executive office when necessary (it was a period when refusal was punishable by a heavy fine, as Isaac D'Israeli had experienced), he vacated it as soon as he could. There was one period, indeed, when his Jewish allegiance was thought to be dubious, and it was said, with palpable exaggeration, that but for an oath he took over his father's grave he would have embraced Christianity.

In his immediate descendants however—astonishingly enough—Jewish allegiances were strengthened; an unusual prodigy, fitting for an unusual family, for the process is generally reversed. With the progress of time, the English Rothschilds became identified more and more closely with the

affairs of English Jewry. Partly this was the result of the profound sense of *noblesse oblige* which characterized them from generation to generation. But there was something besides this. There was a deep religious feeling, an implicit acceptance of the basis of Jewish teaching, a devotion to Jewish causes which was perhaps intensified by that same inbreeding which was responsible for their accumulated financial instinct and artistic acumen.

The chronicler may notice that the ritual prescriptions were not faithfully followed in the sybarite menus served up in Rothschild Row and the Vale of Aylesbury. He may suspect that the report which was current, that a portion of the cornice at 148 Piccadilly was unfinished in token of mourning at the destruction of Jerusalem, was founded on a sense of theoretical propriety rather than on examination of the site. Yet there can be no question of the profound Jewish loyalty which continued to inspire the Rothschilds generation after generation, in a sense which was true of few other outstanding Anglo-Jewish families. And, if this is to their credit, it is no less to England's that this unqualified loyalty did nothing whatsoever to weaken their position in the country. Indeed, it is noteworthy that Rothschilds played their greatest part in English life precisely at that period when they were most closely associated with the affairs of the Jewish community. It was a question of supplementary, not conflicting, allegiances: and the solid good sense of the Englishman is quick to realize that a man is necessarily a better, not a worse citizen if he makes no attempt to hide his origin or to repudiate those to whom he is united by ties of a common faith and a common history.

In the second generation, it was Baron Lionel

who represented the Anglo-Jewish community mainly in its external relations: and his leadership in the struggle for Parliamentary emancipation, over a quarter of a century, gave him a commanding position. Moreover, he worked manfully on behalf of his co-religionists overseas. In 1843, he had collaborated with Sir Moses Montefiore in his endeavours to ameliorate the condition of the Jews of Russia and Poland; in 1854, he and Anthony interviewed Lord Clarendon to make sure that the Jews of Turkey would not be jeopardized in the course of the forthcoming international conversations; and an appeal from him on behalf of the Roumanian Jews was read at the Berlin Congress in 1878, when his old friend Benjamin Disraeli was assisting in remodelling the map of south-eastern Europe. Domestically, therefore, the part which he played was not so prominent: and, if he followed paternal and avuncular tradition by acting as Warden of the Great Synagogue, and served for some time on the Board of Deputies of British Jews, he refused the Presidency of this body when he was elected to it in 1855. On the other hand, he supported Jewish charities munificently (it was said that, in accordance with Rabbinic prescription, more than one-tenth of his great income was regularly devoted to charitable objects); and he took a particularly great interest in the Jews' Free School in London, which, through his and his wife's efforts, was raised from a squalid local affair into one of the best and largest educational institutions of its sort in London.

It was Sir Anthony, his brother, to whom leadership in the internal affairs of the community was left. He was somewhat patronizing about it, descending a little self-consciously from his pedes-

tal to engage in these parochial activities. But his services were none the less devoted and unremitting. He was quasi-permanent President of the Jews' Free School, President of the Jews' Hospital, and connected with many other communal institutions. Above all, he took a prominent share in establishing the United Synagogue in London—a model inter-congregational organization, one of the finest of its type in the world—and in 1870 became its first President.

The women of the family were no less devoted. Some of them even gave literary expression, though not of a very high order, to their enthusiasms. Baroness Lionel composed a volume of Prayers and Meditations (still sometimes reprinted) and another of addresses to young children for use in her pet institution, the Jews' Free School; her nieces, Anthony's two children, wrote that heavy work on the History and Literature of the Israelites, which has been mentioned above. One communal charity after the other owed its origin to one or another member of the family. It was due to Baroness Lionel, for example, that the Home for Jewish Incurables was founded in London. Baroness Mayer, compensating for her husband's lack of enthusiasm for anything non-equine, founded the Jews' Deaf and Dumb Home. This was of far more than communal importance: for the new methods of teaching introduced here by Lionel Van Praagh were so successful that she subsequently was instrumental in establishing the Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, which was the pioneer of the lip-reading system in England.

It was with the third generation, however, that the family interest in communal affairs reached its

zenith. One reason for this was, simply, that it had survived its competitors. When the grandfather had arrived in England, it had been the Goldsmid family that was all-important; but the Goldsmids had financial misfortunes, and their main line was doomed to speedy extinction. Sir David Salomons was as much almost in the public eye as Baron Lionel at the time of the great fight for the admission of the Jews to Parliament; but he had no son, and his nephew, who succeeded him in the title, was more interested in electricity than in Jews. During the lifetime of Sir Moses Montefiore, that prince of philanthropists (who almost to the close of his hundred crowded years of life continued to travel and to work and to plead for the relief of his suffering co-religionists throughout the world) his was indubitably the first name that came to the mind of every Jew. But he passed away in 1885, leaving no child to carry on his work. The position of the head of the Rothschild family, as the foremost English Jew, was now unquestioned. As it happened, the same year saw Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild's elevation to the House of Lords, as the first, and for some time the only, Jewish peer. This seemed to place the cachet of official approval on him, and to make him, in a very real sense, the Prince of the Exile. England was the foremost world power, English Jewry was the wealthiest and the most emancipated (if among the least orthodox) of world Jewries: Lord Rothschild was the foremost Jew in England, and hence—logically—in the world.

There was one person only, in the family or outside, who might be compared with him. This was his cousin several times over, Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris, familiar also in London



—old James Rothschild's youngest son. He was banker, connoisseur, collector and art-expert like all his family. It was not this, though, which gave him immortality, but his benevolence. Paris is dotted with his benefactions—scientific, medical, artistic, and philanthropic. But above all, in the 'eighties of the last century, when the Jewish agricultural colonies in Palestine were facing a crisis, he came to their support, nourished them, financed them, extended them, nursed them into life and thus laid the foundation of the new Jewish settlement and of the rebirth of the Jewish people in Palestine, which is a living monument to his devotion. For more than half of his long life of nearly ninety years he pursued this ideal. The monetary cost was great, the cost in energy greater still; but it was repaid by a tribute of affection from his co-religionists throughout the world such as few men have ever known. If the English Lord Rothschild was the most respected and influential of the world's Jews, his French cousin was perhaps the most beloved.

Genealogically, too, the Rothschilds occupied a commanding position in the Anglo-Jewish community. Through their grandmother, the wife of the founder of the English house, they were descended from Levi Barent Cohen, and were, therefore, cousins of Sir Benjamin Cohen, Lionel Cohen, and Arthur Cohen, K.C.—all distinguished politicians in their day, and the latter a very distinguished lawyer as well. Another daughter of Levi Barent Cohen had married Sir Moses Montefiore, the veteran champion of Israel. The three brothers were thus his great-nephews, and when he died the eldest (who was in fact to succeed to his position as the lay leader of Jewry) was one of his

executors. Another descendant of Levi Barent Cohen married Samuel Montagu, later the first Lord Swaythling—the only wealthy man who had the zeal and force of character to dispute Natty's position as communal tyrant. A sister of Nathan Mayer's was wife of Benedict Worms, whose son Solomon was educated in England, and became the father of Baron Henry de Worms, later Lord Pirbright, the Admirable Crichton of the Conservative Party (and some people said, its champion bore) at the close of the century. Hence, if there were deducted from the Anglo-Jewish community all those whom the Rothschilds had always called by their first names, not many of the upper stratum would have been left.

It might have been imagined that the members of a family whose background, education and life were so far removed from the conventional sphere of the Jewish community would have been definitely assimilationist, if only in the better sense of that much abused term: that, however faithful to the spiritual ideals of their ancestors, they would have welcomed the transmutation of the old forms into something more in accordance with the conventions of the environment. But necessarily the historic sense of the Rothschilds was very keenly developed: and in consequence they maintained generation after generation a reverence for the traditional forms of Judaism (much to the surprise of transatlantic co-religionists, who at that time considered it beneath their dignity to continue their membership of an orthodox synagogue once their bank balance reached a respectable figure). They were all three members of orthodox synagogues (of more than one, in fact) which they attended regularly, on the more important solemnities at

least. The more appealing of the domestic ceremonies were observed in their homes. A citron and palm-branch were to be seen in the office at New Court during the Feast of Tabernacles, as tradition prescribed. They opposed—the head of the family above all—anything which savoured of radical reform. They continued the old tradition of the family, always keeping their banking-house closed on Saturdays, as the Jewish Sabbath, on which day no business was contracted. They liked to intersperse homely Jewish phrases in their conversation, and enjoyed Jewish jokes, of which they transmitted the more choice to an August Personage. They even used the argot for code purposes. On one occasion, when the end of a long-drawn war was in sight, an agent abroad sent them an innocuous telegram to the effect that Mr. Sholem was arriving (*Sholem*, or *Shalom* is of course the Hebrew term for Peace).

The family predominance was due in part, it must be admitted, to the power of the purse. For, if the Rothschilds were the dictators of the community, they paid handsomely for the privilege—or, to put it another way, they considered that they owed it to themselves to superintend the administration of their lavish benefactions. If in the City of London generally their contributions invariably topped the list of charities, in the Jewish community they were frequently not only unsurpassed but even unapproached. To certain persons they were always accessible, and the number of charitable petitions brought them by their friends was beyond reckoning. Not a small proportion of their little corps of almoners devoted their time to Jewish matters alone. One of them had as his special concern Palestine, where they maintained

a school for girls in memory of their sister Evelina, Ferdy's wife, and whence they could be pretty sure to receive special appeals on the approach of all the Jewish holidays, for the provision of unleavened bread or what-not. Private individuals galore approached them for assistance, and in deserving cases seldom in vain. Communal institutions regarded their benefactions as part of the Divine scheme for the government of the Universe. (Their support of the Jews' Free School alone—the favourite family institution—was said to cost the head of the firm £15,000 a year.) Every Jewish minister in London once received a gift from New Court on his marriage: at the Jewish New Year, great baskets of flowers and fruits were delivered to the more fortunate "with the compliments of N. M. Rothschild and Sons": and a fortnight later every Synagogue which so desired (in the Metropolis at least), as well as many private persons, received a bundle of verdant branches from Gunnersbury Park to cover the traditional booth on the Feast of Tabernacles.

From 1874 onwards, all the communal interests and dignities and responsibilities of the previous generation devolved on the three brothers—or rather, since Alfred held himself aloof from such things, on the oldest and the youngest. Between them, the two monopolized the highest executive offices of a surprising number of institutions in the Jewish community, were represented on others, and controlled some of the rest. Leopold was Chairman of the Jewish Emigration Society (founded by his mother), a Vice-President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, a Treasurer of the Jewish Board of Guardians, and a member of the council of half a dozen other communal organiz-

ations, on all of which he took his duties very seriously.

But it was on Nathaniel, as head of the family and head of the firm, that the principal responsibility devolved. His influence was not to be gauged solely by the actual number of positions which he occupied, and his wife with him: though their name was legion. It was a question more of fact than of form. Men thought him, and he thought himself, and even hyper-critical Hebrews were willing to admit that he was, the lay head of the Jewish community in England: an elusive position, but one to which the man who was at the same time the most prominent, the most wealthy and perhaps the most devoted English Jew certainly had the best title. Nothing else would have justified his taking his place at Hyde Park Corner on June 23rd, 1897, on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, to present her a loyal address on behalf of the Jewish children of the Empire, as Cardinal Vaughan did on behalf of the Catholics.

His most important single office was the Presidency of the United Synagogue. In this he succeeded Sampson Lucas (his uncle's successor) in 1879, and he retained the office to his death thirty-six years later. Its offices were next door to the Great Synagogue, the historic religious centre of London Jewry, which, though deserted by fashion, still retained its sentimental hegemony, and of which he was quasi-perpetual warden. The edifice stands in the famous Aldgate square which delineates the site of the Great Court of the former Priory of the Holy Trinity, which London Jewry persists (notwithstanding the appellations which may be bestowed upon it by officialdom) in calling

by its old name of Duke's Place. During Lord Rothschild's long period of control, however, the real seat of administration was at New Court. For he was no *roi fainéant*. When he accepted office, he accepted responsibility as well: and, though men might object vocally to his dictatorial methods, no one could ever complain with justice of his lack of interest or zeal. "I won't write a letter to that anti-Semitic rag," he once declared, when he was asked to send a formal communication to a very important journal indeed, then in unfortunate management and fallen on evil days.

His autocratic methods, which developed more and more with the years, were not always appreciated. "Sit down, sir," he called to a distinguished Jewish K.C., who ventured to oppose one of his schemes. "I'll not sit down for you, my Lord," retorted the other, who was accustomed to the technique of brow-beating and hardly relished its being practised on himself. Later on, when Dr. Hermann Adler died, Lord Rothschild took the leading part in the election of his successor to the office of Chief Rabbi. There was unwelcome Press publicity, there were stormy meetings, there were intrigues and counter-intrigues. The President of the United Synagogue made inquiries and decided on his nominee: and nothing could shake his decision. He even gave it to be understood that he would sever his connexion with the various communal organizations with which he was associated should his advice be rejected. Notwithstanding the obvious difficulties, a Committee was formed to urge the appointment of another candidate to the office. A deputation attended at New Court to urge its views. Lord Rothschild heard their principal spokesman out, with growing impatience. At last

his turn came to speak. "—— —," he said, without troubling to make use of any of the titles dictated by convention, "You are a hypocrite; and I hate hypocrites."

In the end, he had his own way—partly because of a moving last-minute appeal for an amicable settlement by his brother Leopold. But he was tired out. "I hope I may not live to see another Rabbinate election," he said, wearily, as he stepped down from the platform. But a different side of his nature showed itself when he presided at the induction of his nominee into his new office, in the historic walls of the Great Synagogue. He formally took the scroll of the Law from the Ark, and, as he handed it over to the new Chief Rabbi, said a few words to him in an undertone. It was only after his death that they were made public. "I give the Torah into your keeping," he said, "to bring up the congregations of Israel in your charge in accordance with its precepts."

But to Lord Rothschild, as to his brothers and his progenitors, the Jewish question was pure philanthropy. Granted tranquillity, the proper eleemosynary organizations and an adequate supply of money, all the difficulties of the moment would ultimately be swept away. He was horrified rather than otherwise at the audacious scheme propounded towards the close of the nineteenth century by Theodor Herzl, that fascinatingly handsome Viennese journalist, for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people guaranteed by public law—the scheme which became known as Zionism. It seemed to Rothschilds, accepted as they were in every stratum of society, as a dangerous innovation, which might undermine the basis of Jewish emancipation in

western European countries: and he would not even see Herzl when he first came over to England. On the other hand, he refused to ally himself with the opposition organized in 1900 to the other's financial plans, not being willing to ruin a scheme which had in it the potentialities at least of good. When in the end he met him personally, he fell to some extent under his spell, endorsed some of his incidental schemes, and on his death contributed generously to the support of his family.<sup>1</sup>

The outbreak of persecution in Russia in 1881 sent forth hordes of penniless refugees, year after year, to the new lands of opportunity to the west. Large numbers of them found their way to England, and a serious problem confronted the Anglo-Jewish community. Immigrants—whether Protestant refugees in the seventeenth century or starving Irish in the eighteenth or Russian Jews in the nineteenth or “Non-Aryans” from Central Europe in the twentieth—are certain to be accused by the natives of under-cutting and over-crowding, of increasing competition and diminishing employment. The idea is of course based upon a fallacy: for clearly there can be no more valuable addition to the wealth of a country than the immigration of persons of good will and good capabilities, whose upbringing and education have cost the State

<sup>1</sup> The statement that Lord Rothschild would not see Herzl when the latter first came over to England should not be interpreted as meaning that he refused him an interview. Herzl, however, did not wish to risk a rebuff, and waited for an invitation, which Lord Rothschild, though it was suggested time after time, refused to extend. But when the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration was set up in 1902, L. J. Greenberg, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* and a very eager Zionist, suggested that the leader of the new movement should be invited to give evidence on the score of his particularly intimate knowledge of the condition of foreign Jewry, hoping that this might bring the two men at last into contact. Lord Rothschild fell into this innocent trap, saw to it that the invitation to appear should be extended to Herzl (who incidentally made a superb impression on the Commission) and made up for his previous lack of cordiality by giving a Rothschildian reception for the visitor at Tring Park.



nothing. English Jews however were placed in a difficult position. It was obvious that this influx of penniless refugees from abroad put a considerable strain upon their resources (for it was a point of pride, as well as of policy, never to allow them to become dependent on the public rates). It was no less obvious that the arrival of large numbers of foreign Jews would enhance the difficulties of those who had only just vindicated their own position as Englishmen, by inviting attention to a large body who, indubitably, were not. It was to be feared, moreover, that the unpopularity which the new immigrants would inevitably attract might react unfavourably on their English co-religionists.

As far as their material interests went, therefore, the English Jews should have been the first to attempt to exclude these newcomers. But material interests were not all. Those concerned were after all their co-religionists, massacred and maltreated and persecuted in a foreign land simply because—whatever the reason officially given might be—they worshipped the God of their fathers in the manner which they had inherited from their fathers. And it was impossible for English Jews, if they desired to maintain their right to the name of Jews, “merciful sons of merciful sires,” to close their pockets or their hearts or their gates. Whatever might be the cost to them personally, an asylum for the persecuted must be found. And in arriving, however reluctantly and with whatever searchings of heart, at this conclusion, Lord Rothschild was expressing the feelings of the great mass of his English co-religionists and interpreting the English as well as the Jewish tradition of the past at its finest.

If foreign Jews were to settle in the country,

however, the community owed it to the strangers and to themselves and to the country at large to see that concerted measures should be taken to anglicize them and render them more congenial to their new environment. This was Lord Rothschild's profound conviction. In 1889, he became a member of a Parliamentary Commission to report on the congestion in the population of London, in order to represent the specific interests of the Jewish community: and, following the example of Haroun al-Raschid, he explored the East End incognito, night after night, under the conduct of the extremely capable Secretary of the United Synagogue, Asher Asher, to inspect conditions for himself. A result of this was what became known as the East End Scheme, a plan for improving the spiritual life and social condition of East End Jewry by constructing in Whitechapel Road a grandiose Synagogue, with an extensive communal and social centre annexed—an innovation which would necessarily have entailed the absorption of the mushroom Bethels which were pullulating in the vicinity.

Lord Rothschild was never an ornamental figure-head, who simply appealed to others' generosity, and offered £20,000 towards the expenses. But the scheme was vigorously opposed by some other Anglo-Jewish leaders—notably by Samuel Montagu, who automatically objected to any plan which had the benediction of or owed its existence to the initiative of his rival. The debates were long and stormy. In the end, little came of them except the establishment of annual free services for the Jewish masses of the East End, which were held on the New Year and the Day of Atonement under the auspices of the United Synagogue in the Great

Assembly Hall in Mile End, accommodating thousands of worshippers. Lord Rothschild long made it a point to attend, and year by year read the Prophetical lesson from the Book of Jonah at the afternoon service on the Day of Atonement—not in the Hebrew original but (to the horror of some hide-bound conservatives) in English. His entry into the hall was one of the highlights of the day, and for a moment the voluble piety of the worshippers was hushed. Once a visitor, impressed by this sudden quiet, inquired the reason of his neighbour. "The Lord has come," he was informed succinctly, as the other prepared to resume his devotions.

The panacea for the Jewish problem at the time was mass emigration to America, where at this time the Labour Famine made it possible for hundreds of thousands of Europe's teeming surplus to be absorbed each year. English Jews tried to relieve the congestion in the East End by diverting the tide of immigration so far as possible across the Atlantic. In this, the Rothschilds were at one with Hermann Landau, a warm-hearted Jewish philanthropist, whose Eastern European origin made him sympathize deeply with the suffering Eastern European Jewry. There was one occasion when the latter, driving home, found his house in Bryanston Square beset by a seething mass of humanity. He stopped, and asked a policeman what had happened. He was informed that it was a new contingent of Russian refugees fresh from the Docks, awaiting his return. Realizing that something had to be done immediately, he turned his brougham round and drove straight to New Court, where he was shown up into the Partners' Room. He explained the problem and the solution he pro-

posed—a temporary shelter for the new arrivals, whence they should be transshipped gradually across the Atlantic. The cost he anticipated to be £5,000 annually for five years. It was not a matter which admitted prolonged consideration: and Lord Rothschild intimated that he would have £30,000 placed to his credit next day.

“But you have made a mistake,” said the visitor. “I only need £25,000.”

The Peer turned to his youngest brother. “Do you hear that, Leo?” he said. “Landau’s having pity on us.” (The word he actually used was not pity but *rachmonus*, which is pity in the nth degree, combined with the inexhaustible charity of the people whose main luxury it has been for two thousand years.)

Ultimately, in 1902, when a Royal Commission on Alien Immigration was nominated, Lord Rothschild was made one of its members in order to represent the views and outlook of the Jewish community, who were so intimately concerned with the problem. It can hardly have been a pleasant piece of work. It would have been easy enough for him to have refused or to have dissociated himself from his lowly co-religionists of the East End, who were to some extent on trial. But it was not his way to close his ears to the call of duty. He was unremitting in his attendance, and he zealously championed the Jewish immigrant and his way of life, maintaining that he was a valuable addition to the population of the country. It was amusing to see him arrive every day, generally late, with a little basket of choice blooms from his Tring hot-houses, and go round from one place to the other giving every member of the Commission a buttonhole. (“I hope you’re not trying to

bribe me, Lord Rothschild," said one of the Commission, solemnly, as he received his carnation.) He would be alert while evidence was given, doing his best to see that the cause of the immigrant was presented in the best possible light, cross-examining adverse witnesses, and never attempting to make use of the protective camouflage which he might so easily have assumed. And, as the session broke up he would go out arm in arm with Lord James of Hereford, the Chairman, explaining how the excessive enthusiasm of a Jewish witness that day might be due to an over-abundant supply of the Jewish quality of *rachmonus*.

The report of the Commission, issued in the summer of 1903, was a remarkable document. On the whole, it gave a not unfavourable account of the "alien immigrant." He was acknowledged to be law-abiding, hard-working, thrifty and industrious. His physique and personal habits were not to his discredit. His children were particularly bright and assimilative of English ways. Above all, it was not proved to the satisfaction of the Commissioners that he had been responsible for any serious displacement of labour, while on the other hand his arrival had been instrumental in introducing fresh methods of production in certain industries, to the benefit of the country as a whole. The only charge made against the immigrant which was found to be justified was that of overcrowding, for which he was certainly the last person to blame and of which no more was heard once his opportunities improved.

It was against this, however, that the recommendations of the Commission, which were conspicuously stringent, were chiefly directed. Lord Rothschild, with Sir Kenelm Digby, strongly dis-

sented from the majority in this matter, expressing the view that the restrictions aimed at the so-called "undesirables" would mainly affect immigrants of the most deserving class. The ultimate outcome, the Aliens' Act of 1905, was by no means palatable, and broke with one of England's most cherished traditions—that of maintaining an open door for fugitives fleeing from religious persecution. It is hardly to be questioned, however, that but for Lord Rothschild's advocacy and zeal, and his demonstration day by day in his own person of the sterling qualities which the descendants of immigrant Jews could contribute to English life, the results would have been more regrettable still.

Where humanity was involved, notwithstanding the popular sneer, business at New Court was not business. In the previous generation, Baron Lionel had refused to assist in making Russia an advance to crush Poland. Earlier still, just after Waterloo, his father Nathan Mayer publicly announced that his firm would refuse to accept bills drawn on any German city where the Jews were denied their treaty rights. This was a sufficient precedent to act on under the Triumvirate. Towards the end of 1890, there was a fresh outbreak of official anti-Semitism in Russia, and the cry of the persecuted was heard throughout Europe. Not long before, negotiations for a loan had been entered upon by the Russian Treasury with the House of Rothschild, and the preliminaries had actually been signed. Notwithstanding this, as soon as the news reached London, New Court broke off the negotiations, and the Russian Finance Minister was informed that no advances could be made unless the persecution of the Jews was stopped. Henceforth, notwithstanding the repeated endea-

vours made to bring about a change of heart, and even the dispatch of a special mission to London for this purpose by the Russian Ministry of Finance, the most influential house in the City of London was barred to Russia, as also to Roumania. The example reacted on the City as a whole: and it could be said that throughout this period the doors of the London money-market were closed to anti-Semitic powers seeking loans.

The result was that Russia sought support from a non-Jewish syndicate in Paris: that the formation of the old Dual Alliance between the French Republic and the Russian Empire was made more certain: that the Tsar's persistent ill-treatment of his Jewish subjects was much more immune from criticism than would otherwise have been the case: and—the crowning paradox—that the London money-market and the House of Rothschild in particular suffered very much less than might normally have been expected when the Russian Revolution came and the Russian Treasury defaulted. On the other hand, when the Government of the Tsars had at last paid the inevitable penalty of generations of tyranny, the firm immediately telegraphed one million roubles to the Liberty Loan which was floated in St. Petersburg—and of course in the long run lost every farthing.

A further illustration of the universality of Rothschild sympathies where suffering Jewry was concerned, was given in 1912. (There is no need to revert here to their attempt to secure the personal intervention of King Edward, an account of which has been given above.) In the previous year, there had been found in Kiev, near a brick-kiln owned by Jews, the body of a Christian boy, barbarously done to death. The "Black Hundreds," the

reactionary and anti-Semitic organization which played so great a part in Russian life at the time, immediately raised an outcry, alleging that the child had been murdered by the Jews for ritual purposes; and Mendel Beilis, a poor and not very intelligent Jewish labourer employed at the kiln, was arrested. In the course of the investigation, it became obvious that the actual murderer was a member of a notorious band of criminals and that the child was in fact the victim of a particularly brutal gang-warfare. Nevertheless, Beilis was formally accused. For two years, the trial dragged on, to the accompaniment of a wild anti-Semitic campaign in society, in the streets, in the Press, and in the Imperial Duma.

Similar accusations had frequently been brought up against the Jews of Western Europe during the course of the Middle Ages, with bloody results. However, they had been consistently protected by the Popes, who time after time had pronounced that the accusation was nothing but a libel, without any basis, or even probability, in fact. Certain of these pronouncements were adduced among other evidence by the Counsel for Beilis' defence, whose expenses were largely defrayed from New Court. The prosecution blandly retorted that the documents in question were to be found in no official collection, and could not therefore be accepted as authentic. There was only one possible reply; and there was only one man who could procure it. Lord Rothschild wrote to Merry del Val, the Cardinal Secretary of State, requesting a certificate of the authenticity of the documents in question—particularly the noble report drawn up by Lorenzo Ganganelli, later Pope Clement XIV, in 1759. This the Cardinal had no hesitation in giving. The episode, however, was not over. For the



document to be fully effective it was necessary for his signature to be authenticated by the Russian representative in Rome. The Russian Ambassador could not very well refuse to do this; but he took care that the authentication should not reach Kiev until the trial was over and its utility at an end.

There were other occasions when the head of the English branch of the House of Rothschild took the lead in trying to secure the amelioration of the lot of persecuted Jews overseas. In June 1901, for example, Lord Rothschild submitted to the British Government an elaborate Memorandum setting forth the intolerable situation of the Roumanian Jews, refused all the rights of citizens, and emphasizing above all its international aspect, as a stimulus of unnecessary emigration to other countries. At the same time, he brought his personal influence to bear on members of the Government. Lord Lansdowne was warmly sympathetic, and the Foreign Office was encouraged to approach the other signatories of the Berlin Treaty and to make combined representations at Bucarest, where the worst of the offending laws were annulled. It was a clear precedent for 35 years later: but unfortunately the world was by then at least 350 years less civilized.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WILLESDEN

THE great House of Rothschild, which had come into existence during the wars of the French Revolution, ended its days of legendary splendour with the First World War a century after. Its entire existence, during the nineteenth century, had been based on a policy of Peace, to foster which it had strained every nerve: how else could an international house, with its family connexions all over Europe, have maintained its being and its prosperity? It was, therefore, not only good luck, but also in some measure the result of consistent and devoted strivings, that in the century which succeeded the Napoleonic Wars the great firms, in the various European capitals, never found themselves ranged on opposing sides. (There was the shadow of hostility only during the Franco-Prussian War, when the Frankfort house was nominally on the opposite side to the French one: but the former had by now lost a good deal of its importance, and in any case counted for little at Berlin.) But when in 1914 Rothschilds who were by now profoundly English and French were mobilized—in the financial field as well as under arms—against Rothschilds who were profoundly Austrian, the heroic days were ended. One side or the other must necessarily suffer a fatal blow.

In the event, of course, both did. For August 1914 marked the end of International Finance in

the old sense—of the mobility of capital, of opportunities for expansion, of general reliability on the part of all but the least reputable debtors, of an international money-market which could look with confidence beyond a few months, of the time-honoured conception of honesty as a national and international virtue. Private banking in England, in which Jews played some little part,<sup>1</sup> had been menaced since the middle of the nineteenth century by the advance of joint-stock banking, in which their share was insignificant. After the war of 1914–18, the retreat became a rout, and the private bank almost disappeared.

A contributory cause of this was, of course, the enormous increase of death duties, which a joint-stock corporation did not have to fear. In the old days there was security in numbers, even for bankers. But when the capital of a private banking-house might be drawn upon to pay death-duties at what would formerly have been considered a fantastic rate per cent, on the estates of one elderly partner after the other, within a very short period of years, it was clearly an intolerable, a ruinous, burden. I have no desire to enter here into the question, whether or no it is desirable that such private banking-houses should continue; whether or no it is equitable that wealth, derived in the first instance from the people, should be made to return in the last instance to the State. It is enough for my purpose to accentuate the fact that no firm of the sort can conceivably continue to bear such a burden and yet maintain its position. And hence, in the long run, the New Court which

<sup>1</sup> The reference is of course to the "Merchant Bankers" of the type of the Rothschilds and Barings. In the sense in which the word is generally used, there is not and there never probably has been a Jewish banker (i.e., deposit banker) in England.

attempted to piece together the broken fragments of international financing after the conclusion of the War, in 1918, was a very different firm from that which had completed a century of existence just before 1914.

The head of the firm, with the accumulated experience of his seventy-four years, was very well aware of the difficulties in store. At the outbreak of the War, his old enemy, David Lloyd George, still Chancellor of the Exchequer, was in charge of the arrangements to stave off a financial panic which could only have been disastrous. He took advice from the recognized financial experts of the City, among whom Lord Rothschild was pre-eminent. The latter was accordingly invited to come to the Treasury for a talk. He arrived promptly, but gravely preoccupied (apart from other worries, his sister-in-law, Mrs. Leo, had been surprised in Germany at the outset of the crisis, for all New Court's wonderful intelligence service, and had some difficulty in getting home). The two men shook hands. Lloyd George was a little hesitant, remembering how not long since he had assailed the other in terms which, as he himself put it, "were not of the kind to which the head of the great House of Rothschild had hitherto been subjected." His opening words were accordingly a little diffident.

"Lord Rothschild, we have had some political unpleasantness," he began.

The other interrupted him. "Mr. Lloyd George, this is no time to recall these things. What can I do to help?"

"I told him," records the statesman. "He undertook to do it at once. It was done."

The moratorium and the accompanying measures

which maintained financial stability in those anxious days were the result of these conversations. But more than this was needed to sustain the great effort that was to come. In this matter, too, it is said that Lord Rothschild's advice was asked. His answer was a model of brevity and altruism: "Tax the rich, and tax them heavily."

For Alfred, luxurious Alfred, with his wonderful parties and his friends from many lands and the life which was a round of magnificence, the War came as a particularly profound shock. Never was man so far removed from his element. He was all anxiety to be of service, but was pathetically ignorant of how he could be, save by his invaluable advice in the City at the very outset<sup>1</sup> and later on by calling for Lord Kitchener each day at noon at the War Office and taking him home to Seamore Place for luncheon. Almost at the outbreak of hostilities, he put his Halton estate at the disposal of the authorities. It became one of the greatest military camps in the country, from 15,000 to 20,000 men being constantly in training there. But this seemed inadequate. At the beginning of 1917, the problem of timber supply—particularly for pit-props—became very acute. Canadian lumber-jacks were traced down in the Expeditionary Force in France and sent to England: but where was the timber to be found? The difficulty reached Alfred's ears, and he realized that here he might be of service. His letter to the Prime Minister, of February 28th, 1917, was amusingly diffident:

I am, I must confess, not an expert as regards what sort of timber would be suitable for "pit-

<sup>1</sup> It is said that he was the only financial expert to advise against a moratorium, which he considered unnecessary. What truth there is in this report cannot be ascertained. But the importance of his services, during the critical days, is generally recognized.

props," but I cannot help thinking that, as there are so many fine trees in my woods at Halton, some of them at least would be suitable for that purpose. May I ask you very kindly to send down your own expert, who would very easily be able to report fully on the subject, and I should indeed be proud if my offer should lead to any practical result.

Thus Halton was denuded of its glorious beeches, its owner being left to console himself with the forest scenes in his beloved French canvases.

The war years saw the passing of all three of the Triumvirate. It was not surprising. In 1914 Nathaniel and Alfred were over, and Leopold on the verge of, seventy: and the strain of these gloomy days, with more than one of the younger generation serving in the field, did not make for longevity. The head of the firm was the first to go. In 1915, before the War had been in progress for twelve months, his health began to give way. Lord Haldane, his old friend, came to see him at Piccadilly on delicate official business. (It was of the utmost importance that a neutral ship suspected to be in the German service should be stopped, and Rothschilds alone could do it.) He found him lying down, very ill. "Haldane," he said, gripping the other's hand, "I do not know what you have come for except to see me, but I have said to myself that if Haldane asks me to write a cheque for £25,000 I will do it on the spot."

The end came not long after. It was just before Easter-tide. He had not been well for some time. On the Saturday, he underwent a serious operation. Subsequently, it was reported (as it generally

is) that his condition was "quite satisfactory." On the Tuesday, he had a less comfortable night. Next day, anxiety was expressed: and at five o'clock in the afternoon, he succumbed.

The death caused a profound impression. It was the passing of the head of a great firm and of a great family, and the heir to a great tradition. The obituaries in the general press were long and eulogistic; and Anglo-Jewish periodicals appeared with black edges—an almost unique tribute. There was an enormous attendance at the funeral on Good Friday in the family plot at the Jewish Cemetery in Willesden, where there are buried perhaps more men of distinction than in any other public burial-place of similar dimensions in England and where there is among the monuments a greater display of restraint, and a greater display of vulgarity, than in any other.

There was a vast attendance. Bearded and ear-locked Jews from the East End, who considered it a religious duty to attend the funeral of a Prince in Israel, and immaculately tailored Jews from the West End, who had come into contact with the deceased Peer in one capacity or another: representatives of all of the scores of charitable organizations with which he had been associated: political associates and former political enemies: paladins of the City and of finance: men who had enjoyed his lavish hospitality in Piccadilly and at Tring: even his erstwhile enemy, David Lloyd George, walking with his life-long friend, Arthur James Balfour. The latter recorded his impressions the next day, in a letter to Lady Wemyss:

Poor Natty's funeral took me off to Willesden: and so another forenoon passed and saw nothing

accomplished. To me Natty's death is a greater blow than most people would suppose. I was really fond of him: really admired that self-contained and somewhat joyless character. He had a high ideal of public duty and was utterly indifferent to worldly pomps and vanities. Moreover he was perfectly simple.

A curious feature about Jews—as democratic a people as the world holds—is the paradoxical veneration which they show for the hereditary principle in their communal affairs. As many as possible of the dead Peer's functions were accordingly filled by other Rothschilds (themselves in turn to be succeeded in due course, whenever it was possible, by yet more remote kinsmen, none of whom, however, showed quite that unbending sense of duty which was demonstrated by their more exalted predecessors). True, that elusive position, as Lay Head of the Jewish community in England, could not be adequately filled by anyone who did not combine the first Lord Rothschild's high position in general life with stern devotion to Jewish affairs. The mantle of Elijah was divided; but his son and successor, the second Baron, though he shunned the notoriety, felt it his duty to do what he could to fill his father's place.

Hence, when in November, 1917, the British Government determined to conciliate American Jewish opinion and to justify its claim to a foothold north of Suez by promising Palestine to the Jewish people as a National Home, the Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, could think of no more fitting recipient for the declaration than his old friend's son, the head of the most illustrious family in Anglo-Jewry, even though he



himself filled no public office which really justified the choice:

Foreign Office,  
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet:

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,  
ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

The choice of recipient was in some respects incongruous. The first Lord Rothschild had been a leader of the school which maintained that his co-religionists in this country were simply Englishmen of the Jewish persuasion—no more and no less. As we have seen, he had been profoundly opposed to Zionism when it was first launched, though when he ultimately met the founder of the movement, Theodor Herzl, he fell (as everyone did) under the spell of his personal fascination. His family on the whole maintained his opposition:



THE SECOND LORD ROTHSCHILD



and it was from New Court that the so-called League of British Jews launched about this time its counter-offensive against Zionism and all that it implied.

The second Lord Rothschild thus stood alone in the English branch of the family (their French kinsmen were more imaginative) in his interest in the rebirth of Palestine as a Jewish land under the British aegis. There can be little doubt that his father would have joined with the rest in condemning his attitude in 1917, and condemning it bitterly. Had he, however, been able to look forward for twenty years, to a period when reaction once more terrorized Europe, when every door was shut to his dispossessed co-religionists, and when Palestine alone not only provided shelter for tens of thousands of dispossessed wretches, but kept up the spirit and the morale of those condemned to remain in lands of bondage—had he been able to foresee all this, there can be no question that his great Jewish heart would have confessed that his judgment, on this occasion, had been at fault.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of Natty's death, his brother Alfred was a valetudinarian, and considered himself a permanent invalid. It devolved, therefore, on

<sup>1</sup> One may call attention to the manner in which in 1883—long before the days of Herzl—Samuel Butler had associated the Rothschilds and the movement subsequently termed Zionism (*Note Books*, p. 239).

A man called on me last week and proposed gravely that I should write a book upon an idea which had occurred to a friend of his, a Jew living in New Bond Street. It was a plan requiring the co-operation of a brilliant writer and that was why he had come to me. If only I would help, the return of the Jews to Palestine would be rendered certain and easy. There was no trouble about the poor Jews, he knew how he could get them back at any time; the difficulty lay with the Rothschilds, the Oppenheims and such; with my assistance, however, the thing could be done.

I am afraid I was rude enough to decline to go into the scheme on the ground that I did not care twopence whether the Rothschilds and Oppenheims went back to Palestine or not. This was felt to be an obstacle; but then he began to try and make me care, whereupon, of course, I had to get rid of him.

Leopold, the youngest of the three, to take over the late Peer's position as head of the firm at New Court. It was an unwelcome task. He was himself by now over seventy, and looked forward more to retirement than to further years of anxiety in the City. But with the younger members of the family at the War, it was no time for a man to withdraw himself from responsibility simply on the score of age and desire for rest. Nor did he have the solace of his favourite pastime; for from the outbreak of the War, while others in his position were trying to argue that horse-racing was a national necessity, that familiar figure with the magnificent head, laughing eyes, and white moustache, was never seen again upon a race-course.

For two years—alone, now, in the great Partners' Room at New Court—he continued to guide the destinies of the firm, to control such activities as a war-stricken world permitted, and to maintain its traditional leadership in the charitable activities of the City and of the Jewish community. He joined his brother, however, on May 29th, 1917, being buried by his side in the family plot. "I know no death of a private individual which will be followed by more general sorrow, for all his life he was encompassed by love and gratitude, the universal tribute to his great heart," wrote his kinsman, Lord Rosebery, when he learned the news. Queen Alexandra, gracious as ever even in her widowhood, did not forget her husband's old friend. She had contributed to the fund raised to signalize his seventieth birthday, which was devoted to the relief of the Jewish War Victims in Eastern Europe; and a wreath from her was laid upon the coffin.

Alfred had not attended his younger brother's funeral, on the score of ill health: and it was not

long before he, too, was borne to his last resting-place, at the beginning of the following year. It was the crisis of the War: and so concentrated was every mind and effort on the supreme task of overcoming the great menace in the field that the passing of this prince of collectors, friend of kings, and leader of society passed almost unnoticed, *The Times* itself devoting only a bare half-dozen lines to recording the melancholy fact.

In a way, Alfred's fortune was more potent after his death than that of either of his brothers. It was in fact larger than theirs, for his lack of family commitments had made it inevitable that he stored up more than they had done. He left the bulk of it to Almina, Countess of Carnarvon, daughter of Frederick Charles Wombwell. This was in itself a serious matter for the firm; such a sum of money, left away from the family, was of necessity withdrawn from New Court, and thus exaggerated unnecessarily the undermining effect of paying death duties on three very large fortunes in less than three years. The Countess entered into archaeological history when in 1922 she financed the expedition which revealed the grave and the treasures of Tutankhamen at Thebes in the Nile Valley—one of the most remarkable discoveries of the sort of all time. There is a strong body of opinion which inclines to the belief that this Pharaoh, who restored the old Egyptian religion, was that Pharaoh who knew not Joseph and began the enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt. It is an ironic consideration that the last repose of the Pharaoh of the Oppression was disturbed, something like 3,500 years after his death, by funds derived from the descendant of his despised Hebrew slaves.

Thus the entire family, the glorious triumvirate who had lived as one man, who had divided among themselves so many spheres of eminence, and thus occupied so compelling a place in the popular imagination, died almost as one man, within a period of less than three years. When in August 1914 the clouds settled down over England, they were still at the height of their influence and reputation. When, after four years' nightmare, the darkness lifted again, all had passed away. There was no-one who could adequately fill their place. There was a great natural historian, immersed in his collection at Tring Park. There was his brother, himself no mean scientist, dutifully sitting at his place each day at New Court, until the responsibility grew too great and he died tragically. There were his partners, Leopold's two sons, still mourning a brother killed at the front not long after his father's death, fighting for the deliverance of the Holy Land. They were different men. It was a different world.

The fates seemed to conspire that even the old landmarks should be uprooted. So long as the companions and contemporaries of the former generation survived, the houses and estates continued to be maintained, pale shadows in some instances of their former selves. But by now all have disappeared or undergone complete metamorphosis, and the tangible relics of the Three Magnificos have gone into oblivion with them. The historic Rothschild mansion at 148 Piccadilly, considered as a home, was not to the taste of the neo-Georgian era, and to-day is the Garden Club. Its treasures were dispersed in 1937—one of the great events of the season in the world of art. A coach and four rolled one day in 1938 with a

flourish of horns over the site of Number One Seamore Place, Alfred's gorgeous residence, opening the new extension of Curzon Street. The original mansion at 107 Piccadilly, to which Nathan Mayer removed in 1825 and which his youngest son subsequently occupied, was demolished in 1929 to make room for the ballroom of a super-modern hotel. The original Rothschild seat at Gunnersbury is now a public park, and the rambling mansion where kings and princes were entertained a miscellaneous museum.

So, too, in leafy Buckinghamshire. The Rothschild Arms may still exhibit its sign in the High Street. But Tring Park stands empty—all but its museum, now public property. Aston Clinton is a country hotel, with a tablet at the entrance indicating its former associations: and a Primrose (descended only in the maternal line from its former owners) has his seat at, and derives a title from, Mentmore Towers. The gorgeous house at Halton, where Rothschild magnificence once reached its apogee, is now the officers' mess of the great training centre for the Royal Air Force—its glories disappeared, its pictures long since dispersed, even its beechwoods only a memory. The head of the House has established himself in East Anglia, and Waddesdon Manor is still worthily occupied: but, in the Vale of Aylesbury itself, there is no longer a single Rothschild to play the squire.

All has passed away—except the memory which, even now that a quarter of a century has elapsed from the time when the shadow descended, is still a fragrant one. There were three upright men, not disdaining their origin, devoted to duty, trying to use their talents and their means for the benefit of their fellow human beings. There was occasionally



an over-keen realization of the dignity of the name and of the position to which it entitled them. Their cult of the beautiful sometimes became fantastic, their liberality extravagant, their devotion dictatorial. But no man ever impugned their good faith or their sense of responsibility, and criticism was never intermingled with bitterness. It seems to one who has attempted to obtain a glimpse of the three brothers through the eyes of their contemporaries, and as they stand recorded in their own achievements, that so long as there are to be rich men in the world the Magnificent Rothschilds may continue to serve as exemplars of great wealth, not ill-gotten, not selfishly administered, and not ignobly dispensed.





## INDEX

*An index is the BAG and BAGGAGE of a book, of more use than honour, even such who seemingly slight it, secretly using it, if not for NEED, for SPEED of what they desire to find. (FULLER, A Pisgah Sight of Palestine.)*

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